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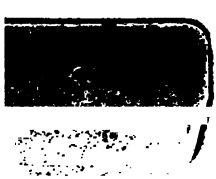
THE CARNIVAL OF DESTINY

VANCE THOMPSON



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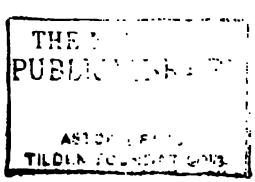
THE
PUBLIC
ASTOR
TILDEN

"Her eyes were steady— and hard"

THE CARNIVAL OF DESTINY

BY
VANCE THOMPSON
AUTHOR OF "DRINK AND BE SOBER," "EAT AND GROW THIN," "THE EGO BOOK," ETC.

NEW YORK
MOFFAT, YARD & COMPANY
1916

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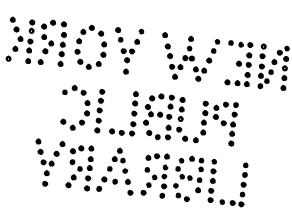


TO MY WIFE

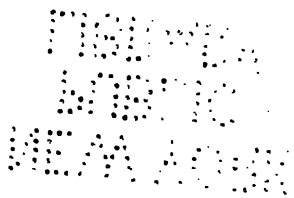
Lady, what of lovers true,
When they lie down, two by two,
Under linen bands and rue,
Dead—who loved so truly?

In the dim earth lie they low,
Side by side, and do not know,
With the worm for bedfellow,
Dead—who loved so truly.

Through the shroud and linen band
They can touch nor knee nor hand,
Give nor take nor understand,
Dead—who loved so truly.

Over them the dim years flow;
Life calls to them "Live!" and, lo,
They are flower and flower, and know—
They who love so truly.

So they pass the cycle through
Love and die and live anew,
Side by side; for lovers true,
Love but once: forever.



PREFACE

He in whom life is potent has journeyed long through the years, acquiring, attaining, perfecting the machine which is his Ego.

For him, as for others, existence is a closed door, behind which mysterious silences stretch away. Yet now and then he hears faint sound in the corridor—shadowy steps and voices. But does he hear? He does not know.

Walking in a crowded street he sees a face; and it haunts him, he knows not why. And he says to himself:

"Yes, I have seen that face before, but not as now—I did not see that face in a crowded street." Suddenly an inevitable memory rises in him. The sight of that face has created a vision of a wet roadway, of swords, of torches, of blood. And he knows. Nor does it seem strange to meet, thus, in a crowded street, him whom he killed in the gray mist of time. Again and again in the centuries he shall meet and know him—as when first he saw him in the

torchlight, his enemy. Life is so long, so long —and there is no end—

Men and women I know passed in their interminable journey down the years; in the darkness. Now and then I saw them—as night-farers see the word on a sign-post by the light of a carriage-lamp, held high. So they stood for a moment, urgent and proximate, in a wavering circle of light; they stepped back into the shadow of the years; then darkness and silence. I shall not see them again; and if I see them, shall I know? They have vanished into the Presence.

To-morrow on the bridge by the old church I may meet a haggard man who has come sinning down the years; and though once he lay in the reeds with his black brother, the bull, and dwelt once in the tenement of black fumes, I shall not know him as he passes, cloaked in his unfamiliar life. And he will go his way down the long road that has no end, faring as men must, in the peril and presence of love.

For no man journeys alone. Always love is with him. Persistent and terrible as life, the love that cannot die and will not change in all the years. And now it is something white-toothed and hairy and vehement; and now it is

a gray thing huddled by a tomb; but when he touches it on the shoulder it turns its eternal eyes upon him and smiles—and he knows the smile and the eternal eyes.

"Is it you?" he whispers.

And love says: "It is always I."

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THE PASSING OF THE HERDS

THE CARNIVAL OF DESTINY

I

THE PASSING OF THE HERDS

I

It began this way: Ahi, who was slim and young, had captured the black bull-calf. He had spread a snare for him weeks before; many dawns he watched and nothing happened. Then one morning, before the sun had killed the mist, he was lying by his trap of woven reeds, there where the cattle came down to drink. They passed one by one and two by two, the bulls leading; the cows with their calves trailing after. Ahi was afraid, for the sun was coming up and he felt safer by night than by day. So this dawn the cattle came from the drink, tossing their horned heads high,

and taking the air into their wet nostrils. The black bull-calf came last, wobbling on his young legs, and Ahi caught and pulled him down. The cattle passed. The boy and the bull-calf were left together and so they became friends. They spoke to each other in their own fashion and life was not wholly unkind to them. Ahi had a way with him that the bull-calf understood. It was a sort of rough tenderness —a knowledge of life—that made them brothers. They wandered together in field and forest. Ahi knew where the clumps of greenest grass grew, and thither he led his friend, the black bull-calf. While the beast ate, Ahi squatted there, watchful and unafraid, rubbing a flint against the stone, for even then he thought it would be well for him to have a weapon.

All this of course happened in the long ago. It was so long ago that there was still fog on the earth and men were not quite men. They went about sleepily. They had not yet learned to band themselves together in order to exterminate their milder kinsmen, who went

on all fours. That was to come. It was Vah who taught men that they were too intelligent not to be cruel. He was a big man who stood quite erect. He had a broad, hairy breast, and quick-moving, hairy hands that he used like tools. There was no one who could stand against him. Indeed, no one tried; Ahi sharpening his splinter of flint, dreamed of the day when he might be as strong as Vah—but he knew the day would be long in coming, so he made a strange little rhythmic song and sang it to his brother, the black bull-calf, as they ranged the swamp together.

In these foggy days of the long ago, the animals still ruled the world. The cattle held the fields as the birds held the air. The great herds roamed, to and fro, over the green hills and the fat plains, quite undisturbed, for man had not yet developed his brain and that fine fruit of his intelligence—cruelty. At night when the sun went down, the herds gathered, lowing; it was an evening hymn; bulls and cows and calves, they lay down on the thick grass, fearing nothing. Man, the eternal en-

emy of all that sleeps, was not born until Vah came. Vah's brothers who lived in the reed huts feared him first. Then the brotherhood of herds knew that fear had crept among them. At first it was all very vague. They saw the deer pass, these night-wanderers, with wounds in their flanks. They saw the timid hares run by, limping on broken feet. They asked themselves, "Who is the enemy?" Then one night a young heifer came home to the meadow where they pastured. She had seen strange things. She had been in the hands of this new, cruel race—the race of men. She had escaped, but she had seen others there—the brothers they had missed from the herd—harnessed to curious tools, whipped on to labor; and she had seen the night-fires whereon her brothers were roasted, while the race of men gathered round and tore at the hot flesh with fingers and teeth.

Strange things this heifer of the herd had seen. The men had built sleeping-places for themselves, queer huts of sticks and clay; and round about they had erected a barrier of wood, so that none might come near them. And

always behind their fragile ramparts they watched, keen-eyed and alert. When they heard these things the cattle rose, lowing and timorous, for the sense of fear and the knowledge of man had come to them. And the bulls marshaled them and led them away, across the little river and beyond many valleys, until they came to a quiet green place among the hills. Here they rested. They had not waited to rescue their brothers who had been captured by the race of men. They regretted the friends who had been captured, but the regret died away as they thought of their own freedom. Far as they could see no smoke from a man's fire clouded the horizon. About them were the green hills and not far away was the running water. As the sun went down the old bulls, strong and gentle, led the way to the stream. Before they drank they lifted their heads and lowed, as those who should say, "We are free."

Only there was one cow who lifted her horned head and sniffed toward the dark horizon of the east; thrice she lifted her head and

lowed plaintively—calling her black bull-calf who had been trapped by man. As for the others, they had already forgotten the perils from which they fled. In their serene republic they had nothing to do but browse and love and sleep. Forgetting man they recovered their old-time confidence, and feared neither the night-wind nor the little moon sailing overhead.

II

VAH'S camp was near the brook in the little valley, between steep hills. The huts were of wattled reeds and clay, and on three sides —for one side gave on the water—was a stiff fence of tree-stems. Vah came home angry this night, for he had failed to kill. He had cast his pointed stone—or perhaps the first javelin—at a running doe, and the slim beast, though bleeding from the side, had outrun him. Twilight had come and the women and children were drowsing when he entered the stockade. He roused one of them with his foot and called for food. In a moment there were a dozen

there to do his bidding. An old woman heaped twigs on the dying embers and blew up a fire. Other women brought him meat and water. When he had filled his stomach, Vah lay by the fire, stretching his hairy limbs and yawning. He had not learned to think, but vaguely he watched the forms of the women, flitting against the firelight, and got a certain physical satisfaction from the picture. He was quite at ease; he was digesting his food; his relaxed muscles gave heat and comfort to his body; his eyes followed the busy, humble women as they went here and there; what there was of mind in him spun round on the pivot of his own importance—he was Vah, of the strong arm, lord of this wooden stronghold, master of all the men and women about him. He stretched his hairy carcass, letting his big muscles play over each other, like a coil of snakes.

Marj passed against the background of the flickering fire.

She was a slim, brown girl, with quick eyes and the swift, furtive gestures of a wood ani-

mal. She stepped lightly and held her head high. Vah had never noticed her among the women. He might not have noticed her this night had it not been that Marj had—inventing coquetry—draped round her waist a tangle of rabbit skins. She was so slight and young that Vah's eyes would never have rested on her twice had it not been for this unusual ornament. But now he watched her closely. He liked the way she threw up her head and looked from left to right, like a squirrel. He liked the flash of a smile that lit up her face and showed her teeth when she stooped and played with one of the squirming children. As Vah lay there, warming his stomach at the fire, it came to him that he cared for nothing so much as he cared for that slim girl.

He had a vague intention of calling to her; but his dim brain was slow to act, now that the torpor of food and fire was on him. He saw her approach the stockade. With a little curiosity he watched her. The girl peered through the crevices of the fence. Nothing. She came again toward the fire and Vah no-

ticed how thick the red hair grew on her head —a tangled mane of red hair falling on her back. He was heavy with food or he would have stretched out his hand to take her, as he might have picked up a bright stone that glittered in his path.

Still he followed her with his eyes as she went toward the brook. . Here there was no fence, for the swift stream was barrier enough. The girl crouched down as one who waits. She would have been quite in the shadow had it not been that the moon wheeled up into the sky over the hill-top just then, and made a white light about her. Her knees to her chin, she sat there looking across the stream. Perhaps certain thoughts stirred in her; perhaps there was only a vague warmth about her heart and in her blood-vessels, as she crouched there, looking for Ahi. She rocked herself backward and forward, making little guttural cries that gradually shaped themselves into Ahi's name. Ahi—Ahi—Ahi—she repeated; it was a monotone of sound that may have had no meaning to her, and yet it may be at that moment she

invented love. It was night now, and Ahi, who was a son of the night, should come.

"Ahi, Ahi," the girl repeated, and Vah, who lay by the fire, understood and woke from his torpor. He sat up and a slow anger began to burn in him. (Perhaps, he too, had invented love.) He looked at the young girl's red hair and the curve of her young back. He began to understand why he was master of men. His strength seemed beautiful to him. He stood up, giving play to bone and muscle. Even the brain in him seemed to waken; he remembered or discovered, that the girl's name was Marj. He thought of going to her. As he stood there she gave a little cry. Ahi came up dripping from the stream. The bulk of a beast, his brother the black bull, came after him, shaking the water from its hide. And Ahi touched the head of his brother, the bull, as one who says, "Good friend," before he turned to the girl.

"Marj," he said.

"Ahi," she answered.

They had not many words; they sat together

digging their feet into the same hole in the gravel, touching each other's hands and rubbing their cheeks together. Sin and shame were not invented yet and so they fondled each other in the moonlight. The stream was chattering by them, and Ahi learned from it a little song that he told her—as he rubbed against her and sniffed the masses of her red, tangled hair.

Ahi was small and lean like a fox, but handsome in his way. He had too much brain to be quiet with. He knew many words and strung them into songs. His hands were five fingered and wonderfully adroit. He knew how to grind the flint to a point and he it was who had bound it fast to the end of a rod, so that he could stand in a thicket and send death from afar. He had two things besides his love for Marj—hate and theory. His hate was for Vah. He had felt the weight of Vah's hand too often not to hate him, and he hated him patiently, persistently, furtively. Young as he was he had lived long enough to know that time was fighting for him. Some day Vah's strength would crumble and then Ahi would

have his hour. When the hair falls from a man and his shoulders sag forward with age—and that would come to Vah some day—was the time to strike him. His theory was that what is done by day is done and over with, but what's done in the night lasts forever. And so by day he hid himself in the forest, wandering aimlessly with his black brother, making fugitive little songs—fierce rhythmic cries of love and hate—for Marj and the man he hated. Daily he dreamed of killing Vah in curious and cruel ways. Nightly he swam the little stream to be near the girl who made him forget his hatred.

Marj listened to Ahi's voice; she did not understand the meaning of the rhythmic words he said, but there was a bright look on her face, as though she knew; she put one arm around his neck and leaned closer against him. Ahi ran his fingers through her thick hair; whispering words that had as yet no meaning; then suddenly he drew her toward him and kissed her on the mouth. Perhaps he invented the

kiss. They looked into each other's eyes, wondering and a little afraid.

"Marj," he said.

"Ahi," she answered. They had not many words.

Now Vah standing by the fire had seen and heard; a sort of anger stirred in him, and he ran toward them with a hoarse cry. Ahi started to his feet, and before he could turn Vah struck him and he went down, his face in the gravel. The fear of Vah was on him and for a moment he did not move. Then suddenly, stronger than fear, the passion of hate surged through him and he struggled up. Vah faced him, showing his big white teeth and laughing. The two men looked at each other; slowly Ahi's eyes dropped; he babbled something and stepped back a little. Vah struck the crouching girl on the shoulder.

"Come," he said.

She got to her feet whimpering.

"Come," he said again and he took her by the arm; and as he led her toward the hut she

cried, "Ahi, Ahi," until the words were strangled in sobs.

Ahi did not move. Blood was dripping from his face, for Vah had struck hard, and he tried to staunch it with his hands. Always he kept babbling meaningless words. He felt the heart in him burn for a moment and then go cold with fear. He tried to force himself to call out her name, but even that he dared not do. Fear was on him—the fear of Vah and the fear of men; the fear of the lighted fire and the clustered huts; and where fear is love seems but a little thing. Fear and hate are twins. And through Ahi's veins—as he stood there wiping his blood-dabbled face—fear and hate ran swift and dark. He did not move.

From Vah's hut a cry came to him, "Ahi! Ahi!" that cry again and again. He tried to force himself toward the hut, but the will in him was sick with fear. With a groan he wrenched himself away and ran toward the stream. Beyond was the forest, and the night and the safety of the dark. He swam swiftly,

dipping his hot and bloody face in the water, and side by side with him as he swam, went his black brother, the bull.

Now this was the flight of Ahi, the maker of songs, and that night he invented shame.

III

WEEK after week Ahi watched the camp from afar. He saw Vah go to the hunt when dawn came up; he saw Marj passing, patient and dull, from the hut to the water, or to the fire; he saw them both from his coign in a tree-top on the other side of the stream. The men of the camp were busy these days. Ahi saw them driving in cattle. One day it was a wounded heifer, with a foreleg broken and hanging; the next day three calves and after that a little herd of heavy or wounded cows. Ahi spoke of these things to his brother the black bull, but the black bull had no words of that language. When he heard Ahi's voice he could but look up at him with great, tender eyes; eyes sweet and strong as those of a woman who loves and is not afraid of love.

And so Ahi was alone. And being alone he invented thought. Day after day he lay out in the sunlight, brooding. Sometimes Marj would haunt him. As though she had been beside him, he could see her dark little face, her tawny shoulders and the mass of red, sun-stained hair that crowned her head. He could remember her kiss. Gradually it became a habit to remember things. He could call back the pain of the blow when Vah struck him. He could evoke Vah's great sneering mouth, full of white teeth, laughing at him. So he lay out in the sunlight and fed his hate. The habit of remembering things carried him farther. He recalled the days when Vah had built the stockade. Aye, that was long ago, before he had captured his brother, the black bull. In those days the men feared the animals. They housed themselves in for fear of the great nomadic herds. Ahi remembered all this, for it was part of his youth. Then the herds had migrated beyond the rim of the hills. The men behind their barriers of wood had

grown bolder. They had taken up the chase again. Ahi kept the tally of the cattle. Vah's men drove home the wounded, dragging the dead. He heard the shouts and noise of the feasting at night, when the huge fires were built. He wondered if Marj were there and, when he thought of her, her voice went wailing through his brain and he would waken to a new hatred of Vah. And, "I will kill Vah," he would say to himself and his black brother.

"We will kill Vah," he repeated.

His brother, the black bull, looked at him questioningly, for he did not understand the menace in Ahi's voice.

Then Ahi laid his arm over the neck of his black brother and pointed toward the stockade, and he said:

"Do you hear? Do you hear the noise and the cries? These are your friends calling to you. These are the cattle of your race. They are calling to you. They are wounded. Blood is running from them. They are to be killed and roasted on the fire. Do you hear

them call to you? My race, the race of men, torture and kill them; oh, my brother, hear them call to you!"

Faint but ceaseless came to them the sound of the captured cattle bellowing with pain and fear. Ahi's black brother, the bull, pawed the earth feverishly; then he rubbed his black muzzle against Ahi's cheeks, as one who would say: "You are my race and my kin, and since you are man, men cannot be bad."

"Listen, listen," cried Ahi.

Always the bellowing of the tortured animals came to them on the wind, but what Ahi heard was a wailing of a small voice—a girl's voice calling to him when he dared not answer it.

"My brother," he said, "you are strong—strong. Kill Vah for me. Kill him."

The black bull, his brother, gazed at him softly, and in his eyes was the look of one who loves mankind. Ahi read the meaning in his brother's eyes, and sat himself down under a tree and thought. Three thoughts spun around in his brain: The kiss of Marj and

her hair, the killing of Vah and, lastly, his brother, the black bull.

Suddenly all these thoughts became one. Under his hand he found one of the flints he had sharpened and bound with green withes to a stick. He poised the weapon until it settled well in the grip of his hand. Then he jumped to his feet and thrust the flint into his brother's side. The black bull bellowed with pain and lowered his head, his long horns glancing right and left. Then he saw Ahi, the bloody spear in his hand. In the black brother's brain there was only wonder. Ahi, shouting strange words, drove the spear into the bull's shoulder. So deep the hurt was that the bull went to his knees. With an effort he dragged himself up and looked at his white brother, the man. There was neither fear nor anger in his eye, but they were filmy with pain. He took a step toward Ahi, lifting his black muzzle in the old familiar way. His brother, the man, struck him again with the flint. With a cry that was half human, the black bull fled away through the forest and Ahi, watching

him, saw him breast the hill and vanish into the horizon.

Now here there were two things invented. The black brother, the bull, knew only that Ahi had invented ingratitude, but his white brother, the man, knew that vengeance was born.

IV

In the great valley beyond the rim of the hills the cattle slept, deep in the dewy grass. Now and then an old bull raised his head, stared at the moon, browsed a moment and slept again. Sometimes a young calf called plaintively, wakened from sleep by hunger; it would nose for a while and sleep. In this serene republic it was very quiet. The stars wheeled slowly out of sight; dawn came. As the cattle stretched themselves and rose they faced the east. Now over the rim of the hills they saw a bull come running. Even as he approached he bellowed to them, and his cries were fierce and sharp. Blood ran from his sides and he was foul with sweat and dirt. He

was not of their republic; not even the oldest bull knew him. Cautiously the bulls went forward to meet him, but he pressed on into the thick of the herd. For a space he gasped for breath, while his kinsmen looked fearfully at his gaping wounds, and then he spoke to them in their own tongue and he said:

"Up, my brothers, up! Hear me, for I am your brother. I have crossed the mountains and streams to bring you warning. I have run for hours. Everywhere on my way I saw brothers of ours wounded as I am, dying. Man is coming—man. He who kills is coming. The white brother who speaks soft and kills."

The black bull shook the bloody froth out of his mouth; his torn sides swung in and out as he gasped for breath. There was an old bull, very old, who remembered the years gone by when they had fled from man.

"Let us move on," he said, "to the new wilderness beyond."

"And man will follow," cried the black bull, in their speech; "he who strokes with one hand

and kills with the other. No; turn back. One and all, let us rush upon him and trample him and his sharp stones and his fire under our feet; and rip his belly with our horns. What have we to fear? Die—if we must die it is better to die killing."

The black bull threw back his great head, superb, fierce, calm as one who leads. The young bulls rallied to him; the old bulls yielded to him; the cows crowded close to him; their eyes lit with admiration.

"Forward."

From all sides the cattle pressed in; fierce and high rose the bellowing—thousands upon many thousands of voices; and the march began. Gradually the captains marshaled them. They went in order as troops march to a holy war. The great republic swept on. It was the first crusade of the serene republic.

"Forward."

The black bull was in the lead; he tossed his great head as he ran; his blood-shot eyes looked straight in front of him—forward! A cluster of huts, something that might have been a vil-

lage, rose before them on the hill-side; the flood of furious hoofs swept down on it; a few cries and the flood passed; then silence. There was blood on the horns of the leaders and their hoofs smoked with blood; the army swept on.

The sun had set when they breasted the last hill. The black bull was the first to top the ridge, but his bellow of triumph was drowned in the noise of the myriad hoofs. Below them in the valley was a little stream and beside it was Vah's village. The flood of flashing horns and ringing hoofs poured down upon it.

V

Vah lay by the fire torpid with food. The girl Marj sat by him; her knees were drawn up to her chin and she stared at the fire, brooding. A little wind was blowing and the sparks eddied up, brief and quick, to spin for a moment and then die against the blue of the night. She noticed that the sparks were curiously like stars; she wondered for whom the fire burned over head—if some one lay and warmed himself among the stars even as Vah lay here

among the embers. And though she knew it not, perhaps she had discovered the great truth. She looked down at her man. He lay sprawled out broad on his belly, his face in the sod. His huge ribs rose and fell with his breathing. Marj touched him with a sense of content. It was something that she was his, for he was the strongest of his race. But always the sparks from the wood-fire flickered in her eyes, and in her mind there flickered brief and shining thoughts of Ahi. She remembered a song he made—a little rhythm of fierce and loving sounds—and crooned it to herself. Ahi and Marj, it was the chant of his name and hers.

The night was full of strange sounds. Though the wind was small and feeble, there was a bluster of storm in the air. Vah raised himself on his elbows, his eyes bright with apprehension.

"Get up," said Vah, and he touched her with his foot.

She rose slowly, but even as her legs straightened under her, an arm was swept around her

waist and Ahi's voice was in her ears crying: "Come, come!" He was wet from the stream he had swum. His voice came faint and strangled to his lips. He babbled. "Come, come," and "Marj, Marj!" for his fear and his love were battling to get control of his will. Savage in his cowardice, sobbing, furious, whimpering, he dragged her toward the safety of the running water. Vah turned and looked at them. A hoarse snarl of laughter came from his mouth. He shouted one word of contempt and rushed toward the stockade—toward the unknown horror sweeping down the valley. He wrenched at the tree-stems with his huge hands and made a passage. For a moment he hesitated, glancing back at the woman near the stream. His dull brain rocked between two impulses. Marj was swifter of thought. She broke away from Ahi's slim arms and ran to Vah. For an instant her hands clasped him and she gave him the kiss Ahi had taught her in days gone by. Then she passed him, running swiftly into the twilight and tumult of the plain.

He who followed and overtook her was Ahi, the maker of songs, for Vah stood dazed, the taste of her kiss on his mouth. Out of the West the army of wild herds poured down into the twilight; and it was an army, and it was an ocean, wave after wave, a rushing tide. The noise of the hoofs was like the noise of many thunders. The sharp horns glanced and rang like sabers. Over all rose the cries, fierce and exultant, as of those who sweep on to vengeance.

Far ahead, swifter than all the others, raced the black bull, all foam and blood, his red eyes swollen in the sockets, his head low, his bright horns set for the charge. And to him there came running, hand in hand, a slim girl and Ahi, his white brother. The girl's eyes shone gloriously and her breath came quick and true, but Ahi was screaming new words of terror, though he would not loose her hand.

"It is I," cried Ahi. "It is I, my brother, the bull! It is I, your man-brother, Ahi, your brother!"

And as though he had heard, the black bull

swerved aside a little, but as he passed he thrust at the girl with his horns. And the horn ripped open the flesh of her side and snapped her rib-bones as though they had been dried twigs. The black bull did not pause. With a toss of his head he threw her twenty feet away, a dead thing, crumpled on the turf. And Ahi, though he ran, did not reach her, for the avalanche of the wild herds was upon him, and the life and the love and the fear were ground out of him under the rushing hoofs.

The army swept on. The wooden barriers fell and vanished, and somewhere in the ruin Vah died, the taste of a kiss upon his lips. The army passed; where once the village had been there was only trampled clay and blood, and silence; overhead the stars flickered like sparks from a fire.

THE LADY OF MAGDALA

O Mary of Magdala, the alien merchants came,
Across the shining, somber sands, that stained their feet like flame.
To lay down at your portals their gifts of gold and nard,
Of quaintly chiseled ivory and diamonds, white and hard;
You loved them for the journey they made through fearful lands,
You loved them for the peril of the bandits and the sands;
And you loved them for the spices, the gems, the bars of gold—
(So soft you looped them round your wrist!)—these wayfarers of old.
But I? I have come further than your old lovers dared,
O Mary of Magdala! With sword-arm red and bared.
I have fought my way back grimly through all the serried years—
(O Mary of Magdala, the peril of the years!)
To bring to you the guerdon of my verses and my tears.

II

THE LADY OF MAGDALA

I

It was a strange story; it happened this way:

There was an old man, the head of a rough tribe, living in the Gaulinitish hills. Because he was a strong chieftain, they called him "Abba," which is "father" in the language spoken in those parts. This old man had a son, who came upon earth in evil days. Sad days they were, for the Romans had pushed their power across the "Great Sea" into the land of these Jews. Now, as the son of the old chief grew to years, there grew with him, day by day, a hatred of these Romans who had come into his land. He was a lusty lad. Before he was eighteen there was hair on his breast, and the hair clustered thick round his square chin. So the men in the Gaulinitish

hills had faith in him, trusting his strength. They called him Bar-Abbas, because he was the son of his father. But what could he do for them, in these days when the Roman camp ran northward as far as Cæsarea Philippi? The boy was but a straw in the wind.

The Lord Sirus, who kept the stronghold of Magdala, which, with all its towers, looked eastward over the Sea of Galilee, took the young lad into his service and set him to tend the goats and sheep. For a little while the lad bent himself to this service and was meek and calm. He saw the children of the house pass —the little pampered children of Lord Sirus, who was the Roman deputy for that province. Always the boy's heart was sour as acid, with his hatred for these Roman masters who were not of his race. There on the hills at night, when he watched his flocks, he would build a fire and lie by it—studying the flickering sparks and wondering whether or not a vengeful God lay sleeping among the embers of the stars that shone in the sky overhead.

One day a little girl came down into the

shadow of the plane trees, where he watched.

She was not very pretty, she was too yellow, sunburned and thin; the hair on her head had too much red in it. In an odd way she sucked her thumb and smiled at him. Now the son of Abba, who was called Bar-Abbas, looked at her, and he felt the heart in him rise and flutter as a bird that is ready to fly. She came straight to him on her little bare feet that were the color of pale gold; she looked in his face and laughed, and said:

"Tell me your name!"

Bar-Abbas gave her his name.

The little girl went close to him and stroked the soft, thick beard on his chin.

"I love you," she said.

This half-savage lad, weary of labor and irked with strange thoughts of the springtide, knew not what to say; he reached for her little brown fist, but she said "Don't!" and drew it away.

"See!" she said, opening her hand. "I've a baby lizard—I got it from the wall."

She did not know, nor did the lad know, that

this was the symbol of her rôle in life—her mission of unconscious cruelty and unwitting destruction; he swept his arm around her and kissed her, crushing her lips.

"I love you," she said.

"And I love you," said the lad; with an impulse he could not control he laid his head in the dust and kissed her little naked feet.

The child laughed; she flirted away her foot with a cruel and futile gesture.

"Will you always love me?" she asked.

"Until God takes my life away," he said; the poor fool was kneeling before her and she, bright and ironic, studied his excited face. Such a child she was, too—a mere child, too yellow and sunburned and thin, with the red hair round her face.

"Then I'll kiss you," said the little girl.

She went close to him and put her hands in his hair and pulled his face up to her face; then, still laughing, she set her young full lips to his and kissed him. And this kiss, did we but know it, was invented that one man might die and that those who believe in Him might live.

II

It was in the old tower of Magdala. A bent serving-man went up the twisted stairs to the chamber, which had been the room of state. As he went he fought against darkness and dust—gray dust out of the old walls and darkness that dripped from the decayed timbers. He pushed open the wooden windows of the great chamber. The gold sunlight of the afternoon streamed in. The woven curtains and Tyrian tapestry showed gray against it, so bright the sun shone. The old man looked from the window; he saw the village and the sea; he shrugged his bent shoulders and threw out his hands in a racial gesture.

"Wife," he called, "wife—wife!"

An old woman came up; she was timid and faint; there was hardly a sign of life in her, save the dark Semitic eyes that shone with unquenched hope.

"See to the couches," said the man shortly; he pointed to the silken mattresses varnished with dust.

"It cannot be true, Hakkoz," said the old woman, timidly, "that she is here, my husband —it cannot be true."

As she spoke one could see that the great hope was urgent as flame in her poor, old, faded body.

"It cannot be true, Hakkoz," said she, "that she is really here—the little girl I fed at my breast—that she has come home again!"

The old man grumbled, shaking the dust from the thick curtains over the bed.

"Aye, she's here—but what brought her?" he asked harshly.

"It is home for her," said the old woman; she was wrinkled and very yellow, as are all the women of her race when age comes upon them.

"Her home? Aye! Now God be thanked her father, the Lord Sirus, is dead," said the old man, "our God be thanked he is five years in his grave. The old good lord; he never knew what she made of her life! The brave old lord! He loved her best of all. 'Twas the best part of his fortune he left her."

"This old castle—the ruined house and the

old tower," his wife said, "nay, you forget the house in Jerusalem and all that went to her brother! Aye, and the fat estate in Bethany that went to her sister, Lady Martha. The poor child had but this old tower by the sea."

"And the lands, woman, the farms," said old Hakkoz, sharply, "the broad fields that run north for leagues. What more could a man do for the daughter he loved? The tower and the fields he gave her! What more could he give? And she left it all. You know her life in Egypt, old woman, and what she did in Rome; and what she is in Jerusalem. Why comes she here? The tower of Magdala is no home for her now. The red woman!" cried old Hakkoz, "the red woman—she whose ankles tinkle as she walks, bah!" and he spat upon the floor.

"I held her in my lap," said his old wife, and always she was busy with the dusty silken covers of the couch, "in my lap she lay—no bigger than that—kicking and laughing and hungry for my breast. Lord Sirus called her his hungry girl. 'Twas no sin to love her then.

And now," the old woman added, "there is none has a kind word for her—not even you."

"Kind words," said the old husband; he straightened his bent back and showed her his yellow face and his yellow teeth, "kind words—she's heard too many of them, the Lady of Magdala. Too many kind words and too many kisses."

Again he spat on the floor.

"God will have his vengeance on her for the kind words and the kisses—the red woman! And she has dared to come back to the old house, her father's house," said the old serving-man. "That I should have lived to see it."

"See what, old Hakkoz?"

It was a little voice keyed to strange tones; scarlet and silver; there was laughter in it—and love. And the woman who spoke stood in the doorway, swaying slightly from side to side—indolent, smiling, slim. The hair on her head was red; it was bound up with silver bands. She wore the Roman dress, falling white to her ankles. There was a touch of yel-

low in her skin, as though in far-off days the sun had burned it. Her lips were full and red. Her eyes had a curious slant downward—under the drooping lids one could not see whether they were red or brown. Always, too, she moved her slim fingers across her hair and eyes; it was a habit of hers; perhaps in some other life she had seen a squirrel play thus with hair and brow. There were jewels round her throat and a jeweled branch of them twisted down between her stately breasts. Her fingers were ringed to the second joint; and between the thumbs of her feet thin bands of silver ran up and circled her slight ankles. Indeed, the slim lady of Magdala was gilded like the girls who wore the saffron robe in Rome where she had lived.

"Lived to see what, old Hakkoz?" she said again, as she entered the room. "Do you mean your mistress? Puh! What an odor of dead things there is here. Burn some perfumes, nurse, 'tis very foul. One would think some one had died here."

"You were born here," the old nurse said.

"'Twas here Lord Sirus, your father, died," said Hakkoz; he lifted his face and looked at her.

The Lady of Magdala did not answer them; she walked to the window and looked out; below her lay the little village, the fishing huts, the narrow street where the naked children played and quarreled; beyond was the sea—drowsing in the sunlight like an indolent cat; and then to the north she saw the meadow, the grove of plane trees, the lift of the hills, white with browsing flocks of sheep.

The youth that had once been hers came back to her bit by bit. She had played there between sea and sand. She had known the secrets of the grove; the green plane trees had whispered to her. She had wandered with sheep and shepherds. The memory of these things came to her out of the long ago. She was a very small girl then, for this was before her father died. Indeed it was very long ago. So many things had happened since. It all came back to her.

Especially she remembered the bearded

shepherd—a poor lad—whom she loved for a little while. They might have been happy together for they had love. But the old Lord Sirus patted her cheeks and laughed at her, and her great sister, the Lady Martha, instructed her in life, telling her that a Lady of Magdala may not marry a rebel out of the fields; so she had yielded, but love had not. The old Lord Sirus died, and even before she quarreled with her sister Martha—for her poor epileptic brother did not count in these family affairs—she was impatient for the new, far life and the joy of alien songs. They would not give her the shepherd lad she loved! No, but there passed a Syrian merchant going down to Egypt, and she went with him, giving him the guerdon of her fifteen years and her unreaped kisses. The Syrian merchant! Then there was the young Greek poet, who carried her from Alexandria to Rome, singing the while his maddening, alien strophes; then the great Roman lord, grandson of the Pontius who was the sea-farer, son of him who won the name of Pilatus by casting the javelin, who

carried her back to Palestine among his train of girls.

He was a curious, subtle man, Pilatus; he was gentle and had a singing voice. Did she love him? Had she loved the Syrian merchant? Had she loved the Greek poet who kissed her knees and chanted to her in the moonlight, as they journeyed by boat from Alexandria?

She did not know.

Looking out upon the sea that crooned beneath her old tower, the Lady of Magdala asked herself if she had loved these men; a red anger stained her face and crept up into her hair, for she did not know whether she had loved them or not—and the shame of it hurt her.

"If my lady is served"; it was old Hakkoz who spoke, and there was a sneer in his voice.

"Yes, you may go," said the Lady of Magdala, idly; she was thinking—as for many days she had thought—of a young shepherd who had crushed his lips against hers, long ago when she was very young.

"You may go," she said, "but nurse, wait. I want to talk to you."

Old Hakkoz went out but before he crossed the threshold he spat slyly upon the floor.

"Oh, Lady Mary," said the old nurse, "it is good you've come home."

"Tell me," said the Lady of Magdala, "where is the Son of Abba?"

"Bar-Abbas," the old nurse repeated, "surely he is with his 'flocks.' "

"Always the same?"

The old woman looked about her fearfully.

"No one hears but you?" she asked.

The Lady of Magdala went close to her.

"Tell me," she said.

"But you are a Roman lady now," said the old nurse, "and I dare not."

As in the old days the bright girl slipped her arm around her nurse's withered neck and whispered to her with little kisses that broke the words.

"Am I not my father's daughter?" she asked softly; "and your foster-daughter, that cannot change?"

"Bar-Abbas is stronger than your father—every one trusts him," said the old nurse. "He is gathering the Galileans—all the men of the sea and the wild men of the Gaulinitish hills—to make war upon the Romans who have taken our city."

"To fight against Rome!" cried the Lady of Magdala and laughed.

"To save Jerusalem," said the old Jewish woman; and there was a new light in her eyes.

Leaning there in the old window-space the broad afternoon sunlight fell full upon the Lady of Magdala; it added fire to her hair and sparkled on her jewels; slowly she turned and looked at the old woman who had suckled her when she was but a half-blind lump of sore and irksome flesh. A sneer ran across her face—it was like a saber-cut and parted the lips, showing her white teeth.

"Save Jerusalem!" she said, and always the sneer ran across her face. "You do not know my Lord Pilatus. Jerusalem is his, as I," she paused and caught her breath, "as I am his." All this was bitter and hard; when it was spent

she ran again to her old nurse and kissed her and cried brokenly: "But where is Bar-Abbas? I have come only to see him—I loved him first—I love him now. Oh, nurse, nurse, my mother, I have loved him always. Where is Bar-Abbas, my shepherd boy—he who gave me the kiss. Send for him."

These words the Lady of Magdala said very swiftly and between the words she kissed the wrinkled face and neck of her old nurse; moreover, as she spoke the nerves and muscles in her twittered so that had Pilatus, her lover, been there he would have sent speedily for his best physician, the slave, Magnus whom he had bought out of Gaul.

"Send for Bar-Abbas," whispered the Lady of Magdala; "it was for him I came—and he only can save me."

"Hush," said the old nurse, for she had got the girl in her arms and was rocking her to and fro. "Save you from what, my baby?"

"From Pilatus—from myself," the Lady of Magdala said softly and there was fear in her voice. "Oh, send for him."

"Bar-Abbas?" the old woman said soothingly. "I need not send for him. Day and night he has watched at the gate, since we knew you were coming home."

"Here?" cried the Lady of Magdala; she threw her head back with a proud little gesture; her robe swayed sidewise and all the jewels on her tinkled and glittered; then she said again: "Here?"

She might have known he would be there. While the old serving-woman went to bring him in she made comely her hair and straightened the folds of her white robe.

III

THE sun was going down behind the tower of Magdala. It came slantingly into the window of the room where the Lady Mary stood and made a mere yellow flicker against the dusty wall. Westward the evening light lay broad upon the sea. Where the road went northward to split among the plane trees and lose itself in the folds of the hills there were

great patches of light and shade curiously distinct.

The Lady of Magdala, waiting, heard the click of sandals on the stairs and the noise as of one who drops his sandals at the door.

She did not turn.

The man who came into the room was black-bearded, and the thatch of hair on his head was coarse and brown-stained by the weather. He wore the coat of his race, girded at the waist by woven thongs of leather. His head and feet were bare, but his breast was covered with coarse linen cloth, fastened high up to his throat. He was just as she had expected him to be, strong, forceful, grim. He smelled of the earth and the sea and the Lady of Magdala felt neither fear nor repulsion; it was as though she had come back to her race and the salutary life of old.

"You do not welcome me," she said with the slow, mocking smile that men did not resist.

"I welcome you," said the man.

"You have forgotten, Bar-Abbas?" she asked gently.

Out of his black beard he growled a meaningless word, but always his eyes were upon her.

"You kissed me," she said with that slow, strange smile of hers.

The man cleared his throat before he spoke. With a movement that was perhaps involuntary, he squared his shoulders and set his bare right heel hard on the floor.

"God," he said and twice he repeated the word; it sounded like the groan of a sick beast. Then he turned on her and shouted a torrent of words that finally shaped themselves into this: "Go back to your Roman! What have you to do with me? Go back to your master!"

"My master!" the woman echoed angrily, for the word stung her like wine dropped on a new wound. "My master!"

"I know," said Bar-Abbas with dull anger, and as he spoke his big head swayed to and fro like an angry bull, "I know. He's your master and mine. You are his slave in one way and I am his slave in another way. All we

who are Jews are his slaves. But our day will come—my day will come."

Bar-Abbas tossed his big head up again and said, "My day will come."

His dull eyes brightened as he spoke; he made cruel, brutal gestures with his clenched and hairy hands. There was strength in him and impulse.

From head to foot the Lady of Magdala was but a wavering line as she threw herself against him.

"How I love you," she whispered; "how I love you!"

Bar-Abbas held her off at arm's length.

"And I love you," he said swiftly. Something like a sob came through the man's set teeth; he got himself together and added quietly:

"Three things I love—my father's God, my country and you." Urgent and bright the Lady of Magdala clung close to him.

"But for my life I would not touch your lips," he said; and he pushed her roughly from him.

It was not thus that men had treated her; a sudden anger flamed in her. There was passion in her eyes and her white teeth came together.

"Bar-Abbas," she said softly, "men have died for less than that—nailed up to a cross like slaves to die."

Bar-Abbas swept his hands through the air, making the gesture of his race.

"It is better to die than to love you," he said; "and I have known that truth for many years. But if a man could die for you—if it would help you that I should die for you—"

Bar-Abbas looked at the Lady of Magdala; he fumbled for words; then he went impatiently to the door. She saw him put on his sandals. She heard the rap of his sandals as he descended the stone stair-case. In spite of herself, for it was as though something had driven her, she went to the window. She watched him cross the courtyard. He took the northern road that led toward the clotted grove of plane trees. She ran swiftly down the stair-case, through the court into the road.

She called his name aloud—"Bar-Abbas! Bar-Abbas!"

There was no answer.

Then she heard a jangle of sheep-bells. The flocks were coming down from the hills. The silent shepherds, stilled by the twilight, came down among the sheep. It was a slow procession moving among the hills.

Now in front of it was a Man, dressed in a seamless coat of white linen. He walked slowly among the tree-stems and all about him was the gray and sudden twilight. Very slowly He approached, stopping now and then to stroke the heads of the sheep or caress the little lambs; and always He stepped aside that His feet might not crush the young spring flowers in His path.

"Ho! Shepherd!" the Lady of Magdala cried to Him, "have you seen the man Bar-Abbas?"

The Man in white linen stooped and picked up a little lamb, too weak for the journey—and held it against His breast. Then He looked at the Lady of Magdala.

"Bar-Abbas," she said; "have you seen Bar-Abbas?"

"Not yet," said the Man in white linen; and He gave the answer very gently.

"Not yet," the Man in the white seamless coat said; He lifted the lamb in his arms and kissed it and whispered, "Hush, be still!"

And the lamb lay still and nestled against His breast. He went His way through the gray tree-stems, toward the sea, all gray. And the Lady of Magdala returned to the old Castle of Magdala and lay down on her bed: but that night she did not sleep—all night she lay upon her bed and sobbed.

"Not yet." Now these words were meaningless, but as the dawn came faintly into the great chamber of the tower of Magdala, the Lady Mary murmured one name over and over again in her sleep. But what name she spoke the old nurse could not tell.

IV

THE sun came up over Magdala, faint among the hills and red upon the old towers.

The Lady Mary waking from a troubled dream, looked curiously about her—then she remembered. She saw her old nurse sleeping at the foot of the bed. Very softly she rose and drew on her outer garments. As she stooped to tie her sandals it seemed to her that she had risen quite in spite of her will. It was not of her own accord that she had risen in the pale dawn. Not because she wished it was she robing herself and making fast her sandals.

The light that came in through the woven windows was very dim, but she could see the jewels she had stripped from her arms and ankles when she went to bed. She tied the silken girdle round her waist—a thing all yellow silk and silver.

Then her fingers fell upon a little glass vase; so slight and filmy it was that it seemed less like glass than frozen breath; she remembered as she slipped it into her girdle, that the Lord Pilatus had given it to her between kisses—a flower-like vase, within which was a little clot of the perfume for which fifty slaves might have been bartered. Why she thrust this vase

into her girdle she did not know. That morning many things seemed strange to her.

Suddenly she felt that she must go away—very quickly—without stopping to kiss her old nurse—at once, without waiting till the day had come. So she went swiftly down the staircase, across the courtyard and into the road; the anklets tinkled round her little feet and from her shining garments there fluttered a perfume of nocturnal hours, but these things she did not heed; something (and what that something was she knew not) drew her on and on, down the long highway that curved past the sea, southward. She knew not whether she walked or ran; only this she knew, that she must travel this long road. Her little gilded sandals cracked and wasted under her feet. She neither felt nor cared. Broad and hot the sun wheeled up into the sky and burned upon her. She did not notice the flare of the sun. Always she hurried on, as one who is called and needs must go. One thought she had of Bar-Abbas; the thought flashed through her, leaving her cold at heart and chill; she hastened on.

Twilight came; night came. In the towns she traveled through men leaned from the windows and jeered at her, for she was a gilded and perfumed girl. Once a woman stopped her and gave her water to drink and bade her stay, for the woman had seen the jewels on her; once she thought a flesh weariness had come upon her and she had slept by the roadside; but she did not know. Ceaseless, insistent something urged her on. She saw the sun go down again as she came up the steep street of a little village.

Now what the Lady of Magdala said to herself was this: "Here—I am here!"

She knew every turn of the street, every house front; the village had been one of her father's possessions, ere he died and left it to his elder daughter; and many a time she had been there in the days of old—long ago when she and Martha were still sisters—before she had known the foreign laughter and the alien kisses.

As she breasted the hill of Bethany, she thought again of Martha—though love had

long been dead between them. Then she thought of her brother. Always she had loved Lazarus, and how bravely he had loved her, this brother. A weak, helpless man he was, for God had touched him with the evil of epileptic fits, but she loved him, she thought better than anything upon earth. Even as this thought came to her it was splintered. The name of Bar-Abbas sang in her ears. Then with a little shudder she feared she must not love them any more.

An old dog came up—growling; after a moment he whined and rubbed against her. The Lady of Magdala touched the old dog's head softly.

She was at the door of Martha's house in Bethany. In the courtyard there were three asses, hobbled, standing meekly beside their saddle-bags. Near them a servant lounged. He had filched a leathern bottle of wine and was drinking, tilting the skin up to his face. The Lady of Magdala did not look at him, but for a second he made a vague picture in her mind; then she saw the great room beyond

which was lighted with many lamps and where guests sat at supper. She did not see her sister, Martha, but even had she seen her she could not have paused, this night, at the door of the great room. As one who goes upon an errand she crossed the threshold.

Some one was saying: "Four days I was dead—I lay in the tomb and He bade me come forth"; the words came to her dimly and it seemed to her that her brother Lazarus had spoken, but she neither knew nor cared.

Again the voice: "See what he has done for me, who was dead and am alive!"

The Lady of Magdala paid no heed.

Straight and swift she went to the Man, dressed in a white seamless coat, and His face was pale, very sad, wonderful; and His eyes were quiet and firm. Now this happened. When the Lady of Magdala looked into His eyes she gave a little cry and sank at His feet.

"Yes, Master," she said. Twice she said these words: "Yes, Master!"

A new life stirred in her; it was as though

spring had come with all its flutter and exuberance of life. And now she knew. There among the plane trees He had called to her to come to Him; and she had come.

For the third time she said: "Yes, Master!"

She would have stripped the jeweled rings from her wrist and ankles and laid them at His feet, but they seemed mere dross.

She bethought her of the Egyptian vase in her girdle. It was flower-shaped, fragile as frozen breath. Within it, like a heart of gold, was a rare perfume. She broke the vase in her little hands. She moistened His feet with the perfume—and through the room the perfume spread like music. Then the Lady of Magdala dried His feet with her hair.

Among the guests was one who murmured.

"'Twas Egyptian ware, very precious," he said, "and the essence was worth a man's ransom. Why was it not sold and the money given to the poor?"

He was a pushing man with a scant-bearded, evil face; he pressed forward noisily.

"Let her alone," said the Man in white, and He spoke very gently; "she has done this for My burial."

Hearing these words the Lady of Magdala raised her eyes upon Him, but even as she looked she cried aloud, for on His pale forehead she saw drops of blood and wounds—as though thorns had been bound there. But the others did not see.

V

THE Lord Pilatus was angry and fearful; all night his Roman soldiers had swept the streets, but at daybreak news of a great insurrection had been brought to him, and he had sent Marcellus with fresh troops. Son of the sea-farer as he was, and of him who threw best the javelin, the Lord Pilatus was not strong in courage. A slight fear made the heart in him sway like water. This day, as he crouched among the pillows, there in the throne-room of his palace in Jerusalem, his heart was sick with fear. If the Jewish mob won it was death for him, and if he escaped them he must face

Cæsar's vengeance, which was worse than death. Fear-sick, mind and body, he wallowed among the pillows of his couch. The two armed slaves—Gauls they were, and brave—smiled as they guarded him.

There were swift clanging steps in the marble hall without, and Lord Pilatus cried: "Who is that?" It was a captain of his guard who entered, crying: "We have crushed them, my lord; the insurrection is crushed! We have taken many prisoners, chief of them all the leader of the mob."

"Ah, you have him," said Pilatus; smiling and cruel he sat up, "the leader!"

"Yes, my lord."

"And he lives?"

"He is wounded, my lord, but he lives."

"A Galilean, is he not?" asked Pilatus, slowly.

"From Magdala," the soldier answered. "It was he who set the insurrection on foot. He might have succeeded had not some of his own people turned against him."

"His name?"

"Bar-Abbas they call him," said the captain of the Roman guards; "a strong fellow."

Pilatus mused a little.

"Some of his own people turned against him? Then they love us?"

"They fear another Jew, who fights not against Rome but against Jerusalem. That is what they say," the soldier replied.

"The insurrection is crushed," said the Lord Pilatus. "Cæsar shall reward you. And this man—Bar-Abbas? He is from Galilee?

"From Magdala, I know, yes," Pilatus said softly, "there is a castle there. And this man," he repeated, "is not yet dead? Bring him here. It would not annoy me to look at him before he died. He has troubled me. He has broken my rest. Go! Make haste!"

As the officer went away to bring him this rebel, Lord Pilatus rose, feeling his manhood come back; but he bade his armed slaves stand near him.

His eyes were on the door when a woman came in and threw herself at his feet. For an instant he did not know her, for she was draped

in a rough blue cloak, and her face was haggard and worn with tears. Then he knew her and smiled.

"My lord, my lord," she cried, "there is a Man who must die unless you speak the word to save him."

"I know," said the Roman governor and always he smiled; "but why should I save him, and why should you ask? There was a time when you might have asked more than that, but you threw your chance away. And now you come and kneel and plead for a favor that you might have commanded in those days. Strange creatures, these women," said the Roman governor. He turned; a black girl brought him wine and he drank.

"Think, my lord; He must not die," the woman urged, trailing herself at his feet, "for He has done no wrong. He brings life. He brings love and life and peace for us all. The Jews do not understand, my lord, because they are blind. Be but patient, my Lord Pilatus, and God will give them eyes to see. My lord, my lord, give Him not up to the Jews!"

The Roman lord studied the woman at his feet; her red golden hair had lost its brightness; her face was disfigured with anguish, but the eyes she lifted to him were steady with rapture and serenity; it was not thus he had seen her last, riant with kisses and wine. Then he thought of what she had said.

"Save what man?" he asked.

"The Prophet," she cried, "Jesus of Nazareth; for the captain and officers of the Jews have seized Him in the meadow there by the brook of Cedron, and will have Him die."

The Lord Pilatus smiled; it was the quiet smile of one whose brain turns to cruelty and amusement.

"Ah, there is another prisoner going to die to-day," he said.

"But the Prophet must not die," Lady Mary whispered.

"It is a feast day of the Jews," said Pilatus, "some foolish day of sacrifice, and on this day it is an old habit to let one criminal go free. Choose you, my dear," the Roman added kindly, but the cruelty had crept into his

eyes, "the Prophet as you call Him or the other malefactor, the rebel. Which shall go free?"

"The Prophet must not die," said the Lady of Magdala. She stood up white and urgent. "You will save Him?"

"Of course," said Pilatus, smiling, "let the other die. Ho! Guards there! Bring in the man."

The thanks that Mary would have spoken faded on her lips, for there was thrust into the white throne-room a man who was weak and bloody and came stumbling in his irons.

The Lord Pilatus went to the prisoner.

"So, rebel," he said, "you fight against Cæsar—and against us!"

He looked back at the Lady of Magdala. "This is the man you have asked me to crucify to-day."

For a moment the woman swayed to and fro; all her life was in her eyes as she looked at the prisoner, chained there, foul with blood and defeat; in a voice that she herself did not hear she whispered, "Bar-Abbas, Bar-Abbas,

you!" Then with a great sob she threw herself before Lord Pilatus and held his knees to her breast and cried: "Not he, not he—I did not know it was he!"

Then first the son of Abba spoke.

"Stand up, woman," he shouted hoarsely. "Oh, God! My Lady of Magdala, do not kneel there!"

The throb of anguish in the prisoner's voice pleased the Lord Pilatus, and indifferently as one who thrusts away a tangle of grass, he released his feet; he went toward the son of Abba and smiled at him and said: "I promised her I would kill you. I'm not sorry for it. I think you've kissed her, and it irks me that men like you," he shrugged his shoulders, "should glean my kisses."

Now the Lady Mary had risen as he spoke; she laid her hand softly on the shoulder of Bar-Abbas and said: "You know I do not wish your death."

"I know," the son of Abba said gently; he raised his poor manacled hands, as though he would make a defense for her.

"And the other man," asked Pilatus smiling; "does He know?"

The Son of Abba threw up his head and snarled; the cry that came from him was savage and hoarse as that of a wild beast; it seemed to him that he was no longer himself, but something hairy and sullen, lying angrily by a camp-fire, somewhere in the long ago; he felt a need of letting his muscles play across each other—of wreaking his strength and anger on this smiling man. A queer word came stammering to his lips. It was a sound of "Mar—Mar," that had no meaning. The haggard woman kissed his wrists—all bloody from the chains—and stammered:

"Yes, yes," nor did she know the meaning. Perhaps some old impulse out of the long ago —some touch of other days—knit them together at that moment.

"Then choose, my Lady of Magdala," said the Lord Pilatus, who smiled always, "this man—or the other."

The Son of Abba went toward him shield-

ing as best he could with his ironed arms the woman who clung to him and could not speak; grimy and fierce he was, but his voice was very gentle; and he said: "It is I who choose, Roman!" and to Mary he said: "You know I promised to die for you."

"And you shall," the Lord Pilatus said with neat emphasis; "you shall."

"No, no," said the Lady of Magdala, always with little sharp cries of pain; "no, no, not you; no, no!"

"You will not conquer in my death, Pilatus," Bar-Abbas said, and again he spoke gently, "for the Roman tyranny shall perish from the earth, and if it be not I who leads my people, yet there will be a leader. You cannot kill Jerusalem—hark!"

Without there was the sound of tumult; the noise of arms was heard; always the cries of many voices—"the Son of Abba!—the Son of Abba! Set him free! Give us back the Son of Abba!"

"My people have spoken," said Bar-Abbas,

"and you, my Lord Pilatus, you dare not set me free; for if I go to them Rome perishes. And that you know, coward."

The cries grew louder and fiercer without, and Pilatus felt the heart in him rock like water. He went to the window that gave upon the street.

"Long ago I promised to die for you," Bar-Abbas whispered to the woman; "what does it matter, my Lady of Magdala, my Lady Mary, if for this one moment you have really loved me. Now that I know you love me I have the right to die for your sake."

There came Marcellus, who was captain of the guards of Pilatus, and he told him: "My lord, we cannot hold the mob. The priests are leading the people. Release this rebel to them. They have given up another in his place."

"I will not," Pilatus answered, shaken with anger and fear.

"There are not troops enough to guard the palace," the officer replied.

Then the Lord Pilatus thought of himself; for a second, too, he thought darkly of Bar-

Abbas and the woman, whose castle was at Magdala, but Cæsar came across his mind and his fear quickened. "Let this man go," said he sharply.

The slaves struck the irons from the arms and legs of Bar-Abbas and thrust him out of doors; in the place that fronted the palace the people thronged to him and bore him in their arms. That day there was no more tumult. A pale Man very white and wonderful, was scourged and given up to the High Priests of the Jews, for He said He was their King; but the High Priests said they would have no King but Cæsar. So the Man was sent away to be killed, after the fashion of slaves who revolt. There was no stir, for this man had no followers, save a few feeble folk.

. . . . . .

Dawn had come up again in that part of the world. It was a feeble dawn, very gray. It made only a little light in a garden where there was a new grave. There was a woman there, and her eyes were dazed and fixed.

Now, this was the Lady of Magdala, but

she knew not if she lived or were she dead. She seemed to see a pale figure, that was not quite real nor quite a part of the gray dawn—a vague figure, very wonderful. Then a voice said: "Mary." She knelt, whispering, "Yes, Master," and twice again did she whisper, "Yes, Master." She heard the voice again, but the words were very faint. A dim kind of sleep gathered in her brain. She did not hear the footsteps that came toward her. Some one touched her head humbly; a rough, dark face bent over her.

"Mary!"

"You! Oh, Bar-Abbas!"

"Yes," said the rough man, lifting her in his arms, "come,—come—I, too, have seen Him."

Through the gray tree-stems of the garden they went together; hand in hand they went, wondering.

"MAKE THE BED FOR ATTILA"

III

"MAKE THE BED FOR ATTILA"

It was long ago. More than four centuries had gone by since those in Jerusalem had chosen between a man named Bar-Abbas—a grim rebel—and Another, who was no rebel, though He was to overturn the world. Over the Roman Empire a new religion had crept up stealthily as the creeping tide comes up the sand. The idlers in the streets of Rome felt its influence. The captains lolling in the baths knew of it. Even the great Emperor Honorius understood that a new idea had been born among his people; playing with his tame fowls there in his poultry-yard in Ravenna, he would say, "I trust I am a good Christian," and with skeptical fingers he would cross himself.

"But what is a Christian?" Aulus would say lightly, for he was a courtier and a poet.

The Emperor used an exclamation which I dare not translate into our modern speech.

"I am," said he. "I am a Christian."

With that he went out into the dull green garden that lay to the westward of his palace in Ravenna and fed his tame hens. Now it was quite true that the Emperor Honorius should be a Christian; but he was not such a Christian as you and I are, for he kept the creed only that he might hold the throne. Indeed, it is well known that he had bartered away his own sister, Placidia, to Alaric, the Gothic leader, in order that he might not lose his crown. He was young then, but he had no thought for this little sister, who was carried away into barbarism to be the plaything of a savage. He had saved his throne; why should he care? For a little while he had saved Rome—and his own poultry-yard in Ravenna. After many years Placidia came back to him, bruised and broken with barbarous love.

"You've been long gone," said the Emperor

Honorius. "It is many years since I've seen you."

"Alaric is dead," said the woman kneeling to her brother, the Emperor.

"Dead?" said the Emperor. "Ah, yes, I remember. My poor sister! I thought my hen Roma would die yesterday. She has the pip. But she's well again. You should see her. She eats corn out of my hand."

"Alaric is dead," said the woman; life had bruised her and she was sad and quiet, "and I have come home. You sold me, brother, to him. I know it was to save the throne, and Rome must not be pillaged by the barbarians. But now let me live here in peace. I am tired and very, very weary of life. Let me live quietly here with my little girl."

"I remember," said Honorius, the Roman Emperor. "You have a little girl—the daughter of the barbarian?"

"The daughter of Alaric," said the woman, drooping; "she is now thirteen."

"His daughter, is she?" Honorius said

sharply; then his voice dropped into good nature and he drank his wine and said: "Sister, what is mine is yours—only the Empire. You and this little barbarian daughter of yours. What's her name?"

"Honoria," said the poor woman, searching a name to touch his vanity.

"Honoria!" cried the Emperor. "Ah, she can be no common girl! You gave her my name, sister!"

"Yes."

"And she is thirteen? You shall live here in Ravenna, at the palace," Honorius went on blithely. "I'll give you rooms facing on the poultry-yard."

At this moment there came up to them a little savage girl; she was watchful and timorous; her eyes were steady and hard; round her head was a circle of thick red hair; her short white coat was muddied and torn—the gold embroidery hanging in shreds; one small knee was scratched and bloody.

"Honoria!" the Emperor's sister exclaimed with calm authority.

"I fell, mother," the child said, "but it wasn't my fault—I was running."

Honoria rubbed her little knee.

"A pretty child," said her uncle, the Emperor.

The mother drew the child close to her and fondled the little red head.

"We must take good care of this little barbarian," the Emperor added, "and try and make a Roman lady of her."

Placidia stooped and kissed the child.

"She is all Roman," her mother said; "her father made her body, but I made her soul."

The Emperor, who was a philosopher in his way, discerned a thought in her words; for a moment he dandled it to and fro, then he said: "Quite right. The mother is merely the soil in which the seed is sown. Whether the flower be rose or peony depends upon the seed, but once the seed is sown, the soil shapes it and makes the flower weak or strong. I've studied this problem a good bit. Now with hens—"

A man approached swiftly; it was Aulus, and his sandals crunched the gravel as he ran.

"Rome has perished!" cried Aulus while he was still afar.

"Roma!" the Emperor exclaimed. "Why only an hour ago she was feeding from my hand!"

"It is not Roma, your hen," said Aulus sharply. "It is the Imperial city—Rome!"

"Ah," said Honorius brightly, "why did you frighten me so? I thought you meant my hen!"

The little girl heard these things and wondered; she was only a child, but she was the daughter of Alaric. That night she slept slimly in her little bed and dreamed of strange warriors—grim barbarians who rode down upon Rome and sacked it and carried away the women and girls. It was a fearful dream and in her sleep she cried aloud.

. . . . . .

The days went by over the little Lady Honoria. Her red hair grew longer. The thoughts in her eyes deepened. The slim childishness fell away from her body. She was fifteen years old. And how dull life was, there

in the sun-baked palace which lies along the river in Ravenna—how very dull. The Emperor had no thought save for his tame fowls. Always her mother sat brooding, staring into the north, as though she were thinking of the savage master she had known—this Alaric, who had taught her that love is slavery.

This afternoon the small Lady Honoria was alone in the garden—alone save for a chromatic lizard that slipped down on the hot marble bench beside her and lay there drinking the heat.

Her thoughts went away into the land of her father—that wild land beyond the Alps. She mused upon the fierce men who wandered there—hairy men who rode, clashing buckler and sword, shouting to their maddened horses. Again and again one name flashed across her mind—Attila, who hovered on the edge of the Empire like a bird of prey. Attila—Attila—the name rang in her ears. She knew how dangerous a man was he. Had she not read the poets of the hour? He was not quite a man, not wholly a beast; perhaps a demon, the poets

said, for the color of his skin was yellow. He had come out of the East, they said, and the new sun had stained his skin. From the far steppes of the East he had ridden with his savage yellow warriors many a league, crossing the sulky Danube to harry the rich lands of Gaul. Even Rome feared him now; the great Emperor, Honorius talked only of Attila—of Attila and his tame fowls. Had he not swept down upon Paris and Orleans? Had he not won a great victory at Chalons, which is on the river Marne? Attila—Attila.

The little girl Honoria sat on the marble bench in the sunlight with her brother, the lizard, and dreamed of Attila. Through all her little veins the blood of another barbarian ran swift and hot. Vaguely she recalled the camp-fire in the fields, the lust of battle and the shock of weapons. What had she to do with Rome? She took a wooden codex smeared with wax and laid it on her knee. With the stilus she made ready to write.

Pausing, the Lady Honoria ruffled her red hair. She would write. But what should she

write and to whom? Always there rang in her ears the music of that one name "Attila—Attila!" It was music subtle and soft as the purring of cats. Attila—

The Lady Honoria wrote this letter:

Attila, my Lord:

I who write to you am Honoria, daughter of Placidia, who was wife to the great barbarian Alaric. My Lord Attila, your fame is bright in the world. It shines upon me like the sun. Come to me, my Lord Attila, and take me. Here in the palace of Honorius I die, for I am sick of this life. I have kisses for you and you shall come and take them. I am young and I love you. With this letter I send you a ring of gold which I have taken from my finger, and you, receiving this ring, will know I am your promised wife—Attila, my Attila. By a faithful messenger I send this letter and this ring.

HONORIA.

When she had signed her name to the letter she bade a slave who was near her summon the poet, Aulus.

"This letter is for Atilla," she said to Aulus.

The poet's face paled. He looked at her with angry impatience.

"Aulus," she said softly.

"I cannot take it," he said.

"For me you will," the girl said coaxingly; and she went close to him, shaking her red hair.

"Attila," the man repeated.

"But if I ask you to take it—"

"Give it to me," the man said.

A bitter smile went across his lips.

"It is not easy to come to Attila," he said.

"I know," said the girl, "that the Romans do not care to meet him."

For a little while Aulus looked at her and did not speak; there was something about this strange, wild girl's beauty that made his heart sway like fluid in a shaken tube; many a lyric night he had dreamed of her; perhaps he had hoped that she would give him her love; for poets are foolish folk; he had never dreamed that she would give him death.

"The Romans do not fear Attila nor death," he said quietly; "they died at Aquileia; they died at Verona and Milan, and to-morrow they may die at Pavia. And if I take your letter to him—"

"You, too, may die?" Honoria interrupted

him swiftly. "Ah, no—you shall see Attila and live."

"One of us—only one of us—will live," said Aulus. He was a poet, and had moments when his courage outran his fear.

"Then go," the girl said.

He stooped and kissed her young white hand.

"And if I do not come again?" he asked.

"Then Attila will come," she answered, and the barbarian blood in her flushed up into her cheeks, and she shook loose the wanton glory of her red hair.

Aulus thrust the letter into his girdle.

"I will carry this letter to the camp of the Huns, and it shall be given to Attila," he said, "and you, Princess—"

"I!" cried Honoria. She turned away, laughing, for this man's love seemed pale and withered to her; and her heart was far abroad, among the swift horsemen and the sharp swords that were sweeping down to harry Rome.

. . . . . .

And there was fear in Rome.

The Roman lords lay shivering in their couches; among roses and wine-cups and dancing-girls, fear crept close to them and hushed their laughter. The yellow warriors from the far East who were coming down upon them were more terrible than the battalions of Alaric, these savage horsemen who rode bloodthirsty and savage, through the easeful Empire. And who could stay them? They were not human men. Their skins were yellow. Their eyes lay slanting under their protuberant brows. Their black hair took the wind. As they rode down upon the land their swords clashed, and they shouted fierce, meaningless words to their lean horses. A wild race—Lord forgive us! An impious and foredamned race! Like vermin they had crept through all the Roman lands north of the Apennines. Now they were crowding down upon Rome itself.

Honorius fluttering about his fowl-yard (for he was a hen rather than a man) knew not whether Ravenna itself were safe. Upon all

the Empire lay fear, white and sodden, like wet linen bands.

They would have prayed, these Romans, but they knew not to whom to pray. Not even a ghost of Apollo haunted the evening air. Venus was dead and Bacchus rode no more—even Pan lay dead among the green brakes; all dead the old gods, and the Romans were not quite sure that the new God, who had died that Bar-Abbas might live, would answer them should they call upon him. Some priests said yes, but the philosophers sneered.

Always that victorious horde, which was the army of Attila, came riding down the sun-stained valleys of Italy; and always round the hearts of the Romans fear wrapped itself like cold, wet bandages.

Now this afternoon the sun blazed hot and full upon Ravenna. Even the hens in the Imperial fowl-yard were irked by the heat; they scratched deep holes in the soil and fluttered their wings; the Emperor Honorius felt for them, and bade the slaves bring water to cool the soil. His sister, Placidia, all in white sat

upon a marble bench near the fowl-house. She was very calm and, save that her fingers and eyelids twitched, was very still. Near her a girl in a saffron-colored gown lolled, one foot drawn up under her knee. The sunlight made strange plays of light and shade in her loose coils of red hair. Her eyes were dreamy. It may be that her thoughts were far away—in forest glades, in glimmering prairies, among the savage hills of another world in the North. She was not beautiful, this girl; as she lay there, curled like a cat, brooding with greenish eyes, the hair of her thick and red, she looked—more than woman ever should look—like the daughter of Alaric.

A messenger came, spoke to Honorius, bowed low and went. He was ill-tempered, the Emperor, for fear and anger are always close together.

"Is there no one to do anything?" he asked sharply. "And the priests—where are the priests? We have a religion, have we not? We've a new God? Eh? The priests are

paid. We've bishops and lords of the church. We all do our duty to them. Then let them save us now from this yellow demon. Attila! Attila! Attila!"

Three times he spoke the name; the first time he was thinking of the barbarian chief of the yellow Huns; but the second time and the third he was calling a little Persian cock to which he had given the barbarian's name.

"Well," he added, and he snapped out the word like the crack of a whip; a blond British slave had come up to him gesticulating humbly.

"The Bishop Leo has arrived and craves an audience," said the slave softly.

"Leo," cried the Emperor, "bring him in."

In spite of the blazing sunlight, the Lady Placidia, all in white, shivered a little; something cold ran through her veins and settled about her heart, for she had known the Bishop Leo. Had not he sold her to Alaric that Rome might be saved? She laid her hand upon her daughter's knee for a new terror came to her.

725365

"Honoria," she said.

The girl rocked to and fro, her foot under her knee, and smiled.

"If it be the Bishop Leo, what then?" she asked lazily.

Her eyes were dreamy and savage; it was as though she knew. Her mother's face blanched, for she was sure that her daughter did not know and could not know this yellow lord of the steppes; but she—how well she knew! She would have spoken but she found no words ready, and as she sought for them there came a *cortège* of people conducting the Bishop Leo. He was an old man, very small and faint and white, but he was robed in a purple cloak that shamed the dress of the Emperor Honorius. As he passed the Lady Placidia he glanced at her and a little sneer flickered up in his old and wrinkled face; perhaps he remembered the day when he had pawned her to Alaric, the fierce chief, to save Rome; perhaps he thought of her soul—it might have been that.

The old bishop got upon his knees and kissed

the hand of Honorius; then he rose and blessed him abruptly with a certain air of celestial patronage.

"I am an old man," said Leo the Bishop, "an old man—and twice it is to be my good fortune to save Rome."

Saying this Leo looked at the poor Lady Placidia; but she dared not meet his eyes and fondled the red-haired girl at her side. The Emperor Honorius clucked to his hens.

"There is a messenger from Attila," said the Bishop. "He waits without."

There were three people who heard these words of the Bishop. Each of the three acted in a very different way. Placidia put one arm softly round her daughter, but Honoria, with a little ripple of laughter, drew away and sat up, staring at the Bishop. As for Honorius he babbled and repeated, "Attila! Attila!" and then scratched the neck of one of his tame hens.

"An Embassy from Attila?" said the Emperor Honorius peevishly. "I don't want anything but peace. If they don't bring peace let

them go again. I'll not hear them. What credentials?"

The Bishop had not waited till the ruler of the world had finished; even as Honorius spoke he had made a gesture of command to some of his people and the seven yellow ambassadors of Attila were introduced. They were small and hardy men, battle-worn and rough. They approached in two ranks of three each, leaving a space for one who walked in the middle. The men in the first rank saluted the Bishop and then the Emperor; having made their gruff salutations they stepped aside, that he who stood in the space between the two ranks might advance. He came forward slowly, this barbarous man. He was short and small, and the lank hair that fell about his face—a yellow, square face it was—was black and coarse. From ankle to knee, from waist to shoulder he was naked, save for the leathern shield that hung on his back. The quick little eyes with which he looked from the Bishop to the great Honorius were bright and mocking as the eyes of a squirrel. Then he glanced at the Lady

Placidia, and from her his eyes traveled to the red-haired girl beside her.

"I am Attila's messenger," he said, speaking the Roman tongue, but with queer, harsh intonations, as though a dog had barked it out. "Attila's messenger am I. What words I say he seals with this—with this."

He threw down on the gravel path a bloody head, a head with thick, brown curls on it, that turned as it fell and showed the white face of Aulus—he who was once a poet. The Emperor spreading the wings of an affectionate hen, did not notice, but Honoria cried aloud the man's name.

"Aulus," she cried and "Aulus! Aulus!"

And Placidia whispered "O God! O God! God!" A murmur of words that were a prayer. The dead face stared up from the gravel. There was a smile on the white face of the thing, a tender smile very wonderful. The girl looked at it. She had never known before what life was. Now this dead face was teaching her that life is death and that there is no love which is not stronger than death. A

thought like this rocked in her brain, but there came to her lips only a sort of gasping cry which was perhaps "Aulus! Aulus!" and always that dead thing on the gravel staring up at her dumb and white.

The Hun and the Bishop were talking together. The great Emperor Honorius listened idly.

"Yes," he said, "of course, yes—the little rogue—yes."

"And the ring?" the Bishop asked with suave insistence.

The Hun had tied the ring in his hair for safe-keeping; he untwisted it and gave it to the Bishop—a thick ring it was of soft and virgin gold, a nuptial ring, the little ring that Honoria had sent to Attila.

"There it is," said the Hun; "it is the price of Rome. Give me the girl for Attila and he will turn back, leaving your lands unpillaged. And she is willing; it was she who called him—she who sent the ring. Is this the maid?"

"No!" cried Honoria, for it was at her he

looked, "no, no!" always the white thing on the gravel was staring at her—"no!"

"She is like her mother," said Honorius mildly, and he motioned up the slaves.

"Take her to Attila."

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Now the strange thing is this: the slaves thrust her into a litter and she was borne away to the North, and at the side of the litter rode seven yellow men, grim and fierce. Quite well she knew she was going to Atilla—the yellow lord; always, too, she was haunted by a white face dead on the gravel; yet she had no fear. Perhaps in her was the soul of Marj, who loved both brute and poet. Or it may be that in her was the soul of Mary Magdalen.

THE SOUL OF MESSER GUIDO

IV

THE SOUL OF MESSER GUIDO

For by diabolical arts, he assumed varied forms and deceived many people by many occult tricks.
FROMAN. TRACT. DE FASCINATION.

I

IT was a chill autumnal night. Now and then the rain came in sudden torrents, splashed across the Mercato Vecchio, whistled along the narrow streets, and stopped as suddenly as it had begun. Though it was still early in the night there were few people abroad, for that day there had been a riot in which the Uberti had killed their enemy and called half Florence to arms. Quiet had come, but disquietude remained; the houses were shut and barricaded; in all Florence there were only reckless folk abroad—vagabonds, soldiers and those who hunt pleasure.

In the Mercato Vecchio, which in those days

was not old, there was a little light. It came from a lamp burning before the shrine of a Madonna at the corner where a convent stood. Screened by the niche in which it was set, the lamp, in spite of rain and wind, threw a lane of light across the wet flags of the market place and flickered on the bronze devil which crouched at the door of the palace Cavolaio.

Toward this light a man went feebly. He was a lean and drooping man, dressed in black clothes that were worn and foul as though he had slept in the sand-pits along the Arno. He walked slowly. Every now and then he paused and groaned; then a cough would hack at his lungs, shaking him like a rag; when the fit of coughing passed he would drag himself on again. Perhaps no more abject thing ever crawled across the market place of Florence. Yet in spite of his bent shoulders and wasted face you would have said that he was a youngish man—thirty years of age, perhaps. He had not the air of a rogue; he was far too spiritless and broken for that; nor could he have ever been a gentleman, for no matter how

low a man falls, the mark of blood and breeding is never quite obliterated. He might perhaps have been a poor scholar, though he wore no dagger, or a broken priest.

Next to the convent stood a narrow house of two stories, set back from the market place so as to form an angle, wherein the poor wretch sheltered himself from the gusts of wind and rain. A cough shook his lean carcass to and fro; when he got his breath back he said softly: "This must be the end of it."

He was too weak to curse or pray; he waited for death to come—dumb and cowed as a trapped beast. Somewhere a bell began to toll the hour very slowly, and the dull noise of it boomed over Florence. It seemed to him that the sound of the bell was like a flight of great birds. One after the other, with huge slow wings, these great birds soared through the blue of the night.

"One—two—three. It must be ten o'clock they are striking," he said, and shivered as though he thought how far he was from dawn and the blessed heat of the sun. The dark,

chill hours stretched before him and death knocked at his heart.

Now, mark you, a strange thing: at that moment he heard voices, the clank of steel, laughter and the tripping of little feet, and out of the darkness, into the lane of light shed by the Madonna's lamp, there came three people. One was a stark, soldierly man, so cloaked that one could see little save the yellow curls about his face; there came also an armed serving-man, his long sword jangling at his heels; between these two a woman. She was tall, lissome and young; she was very beautiful—the starved and dying wretch crouching against the house wall saw that she was very beautiful. He saw the jewels in her red hair, and when for a moment their eyes crossed, he saw the beauty in her eyes. It was strange, too, that when the woman's eyes met his it seemed that life flamed up in him like a torch. His heart beat quick and strong like a soldier's heart. His breath went helpful and painless to his torn lungs. His dull mind wakened; a thousand pictures flashed across it—scenes out of history—men

dying for women and women cheating death with a kiss.

The door of the narrow house was opened from within. The yellow-haired soldier stood aside that she might enter first. For one moment she paused on the threshold and glanced sidewise at the ragged figure by the wall. The look of her stung him like acid, and he knew not whether her message was life or death. The door closed upon her. The market place was dark save for the faint light that went abroad from the lamp of the Madonna. The man shuddered, clutching at the stone wall. His legs swayed under him. There was a ripping pain in his side. He reeled; he knew he was falling and that when he fell he would never rise again. Fighting for life, he fought to keep his feet.

Always the bell rang somewhere, tolling the hour very slowly.

The sound of the bell drifted heavily over Florence, like some huge bird of the night.

. . . . . .

How long his struggle lasted the ragged

man did not know. An arm was swept round him and held him up—that was his first definite sensation; the second was that of a voice saying: "Steady, there, my friend; don't give way—steady." The voice came dimly to him; as though from a great distance. Then he knew that a flask was held to his lips, and something fiery and helpful, like old wine, ran down his throat.

"It is a rare wine. It will do you good."

The ragged man straightened up with a little gasp, so potent was the drink.

"It has done me good," he said. Life came back to him. He recognized the market place, the lamp of the Madonna flickering in the wet night, the bulk of the house wall; he saw the man who supported him—a small, dark, well-fed man, dressed in doubtlet and hose of orange-colored cloth, a furred coat and a cap with a galloon of tawny silk.

"Can you walk now? Good; good. 'Tis a rare wine that, and might bring a man back from the dead. Lean on me. We sup together to-night, and this is our road."

The place whither they went was a tavern in a small street near by. The man with the furred coat pushed the door and entered, as one who is sure of his welcome, and indeed the landlord bustled up blithely.

"Signor Malesto," said the landlord, bowing to the well-fed little gentleman, and glancing askance at his ragged companion, "you've come at the nick of time. There is a capon on the spit."

"Bring it to the table, man, and make haste. This is no time for your talk. My friend here is hungry. He has come from a long distance," Signor Malesto said, and added, half to himself, "aye, from the gates of death."

Signor Malesto had the look of a gentleman. He was an oily little man, overfat, red, yet he did not lack distinction. His eyes were black and dull, as though there were a thin film over them. Indeed, it was quite impossible to read the meaning in his eyes. His mouth was winsome. As he talked, pleasant and confidential smiles flickered on his red lips. He wore

neither beard nor mustaches. His hair was black and thin on top, as is the case with men who lead graceless lives. Withal he was a merry and attractive man. I have said that there was the air of a gentleman about him, and that is quite true. Even as he lolled across the table of the dingy tavern—a little, bloated, boisterous man in an orange doublet—one would have said that he was of good blood and, it might be, of an ancient house.

Food and drink were served to them; the ragged man tore at the fowl with wolfish teeth and swallowed huge draughts of the landlord's wine. Signor Malesto watched him with shrewd but not unkindly interest.

"I'm none of your purse-proud gentry," he said. He had white, fat hands, carbuncled with rubies, and as he spoke he waved them in the air. "I can sympathize with those who are down. What shame is there in an empty belly? In the devil's name what shame is there? Better men than you have dined on the north wind. Eat, my friend—nay, you'll not leave the back of that capon on the dish. 'Tis

the best part. You'll notice, the cooks always keep it for themselves."

The ragged man could eat no more. He quaffed a cup of wine and wiped his bearded lips. Then he looked across at his host, his hollow eyes bright with gratitude.

"God's blessing on you!" he said earnestly; "you've done a good deed and the deed of a Christian man."

Signor Malesto leaned back and laughed. It was laughter so mad and joyous that the landlord thrust his head from the kitchen door and laughed out of mere sympathy.

"I do not see," the ragged man began with a touch of anger, for food had emboldened him—"I do not see why—"

"Tut! tut! friend; never mind my laughter," said Signor Malesto. "It is a whimsy of mine to laugh now and then. You are a well spoken young man and I thank you. And your name?"

"Guido," said his guest. "It is a name like any other—one may be called by it, damned by it. It is a name like any other."

"That is a bitter word, Master Guido—since that is all of your name I am to know—and there must be a bitter life behind it," said Signor Malesto.

"Why should I turn over the ashes of the past? They are cold and foul," the younger man said.

"Another cup, Master Guido; drink," said Signor Malesto; "and you need not tell me of the past, Messer Guido. Think you I do not know you? Ah, it was ill-done of the Holy Father to put the ban upon a man like you, the Aristotle of our age."

"You know me!" cried Guido, his pale face flushing.

"Messer Guido, I heard your great discourse upon the Pandects of Justinian which were discovered at Amalfi. I am an ignorant gentleman, having neither Latin nor Greek and knowing nothing of the humanities. But that was a fine discourse. I have loved you ever since," Signor Malesto concluded, fluttering his jeweled fingers and smiling.

The other man leaned across the table, his

haggard face, framed in a straggling beard, twitching with almost hysterical excitement.

"And you know what came of it?" he said hoarsely.

"Your book was burned at Rome," said the little jeweled man lightly. " 'Tis a queer way to answer an argument, that."

"They would not hear me," Guido went on with sudden impatience. "When I went to Rome they would not listen. I had said and written only the truth. Why would they not hear me?"

"They did hear you," his companion said, always smiling; "that is the reason they excommunicated you. Tut! tut! tut! my good friend, never start like that! The word does no harm. Do I fear it? If I did would I be here at table with you now? You have been priest. Well, that is over. You are always the great scholar—the second Aristotle."

Praise was sweet to this weak and homeless man. Not for a moment did he doubt Signor Malesto's sincerity. He felt that all this kindly host said was true. Banned by the in-

fallible curse, outcast from church and society, he was still the wonderful scholar who had set the Pisan and the Roman world astir. Guido felt that justice had been done him, and he thanked the little jeweled man. He drank again. His thoughts slipped back on the trail of his life.

He had been born in a kennel or a gutter, he knew not where. A Pisan priest had found him wandering like a homeless dog in the streets; then for many years his life had been that of the cloister and the study. Little by little the fame of his learning got abroad in Italy. The Holy Father called him to Rome. There he had written his masterpiece—this book on the laws of the land which was to topple over injustice and make of Christ's spoken words the new laws of a new humanity.

His book had been seized and burned. He, defrocked and excommunicated, had barely escaped with his life, cast out to wander, roofless, masterless, shunned by all. How this great evil had come upon him he did not know. He

had studied and learned many things, but he had never lived. He had gone shyly and aloofly through life. He had never known the flavor of the fierce sins of his age. He had done no ill, if it be not an evil thing to study and labor and write the truth as one sees it; and here he sat, a beggar man, drinking another man's wine and eating food another man paid for in a dingy tavern in Florence. Shame and gratitude struggled within him as he looked up and met the watchful eyes of his new-found protector.

"Ah, master scholar," said Signor Malesto, "it is wonderful that one man should know so many things. Philosophy, medicine, law, the verses of Lucretius, I dare say, not to mention the learned works of the fathers of the Church; and here am I who can hardly spell out a clerk's letter. And yet I am rich,"—Signor Malesto fumbled his glowing rubies—"while you've not a white piece of silver. 'Tis a silly world! Now had I the making of it—"

Signor Malesto paused.

"But you, my learned scholar, perhaps you

know who had the making of it," he said wagging his head and laughing. "But hark you, not every man keeps the thing he has made. One man builds a house and another man lives in it."

With this he laughed and crowed so merrily that Guido deemed there could be no great evil in the words, though men had been burned for less, and, crossing himself, he made no answer.

"You cross yourself, Master Guido, excommunicated as you are, what good can come of it? I am an ignorant man, but you who have been a priest can set me right."

"I know not," said Guido gloomily, for the question was one he dared not face.

"And that is all your learning leads to—a mere I know not," asked Signor Malesto with a mocking but friendly smile. "Why 'tis much of a piece with my own learning. And yet, and yet—"

He made a fluttering gesture with his fat, white hands.

"And yet," said he, "I wish I had your wis-

dom and you had my idle gold. Knowledge! Ah, to know things!—books and lore! What wouldn't I give to have your learning!"

The ragged man leaned forward; his eyes shone with a drunkenness that was not that of wine—it was the madness of one who has reached the frontier of good and evil. He tried to smile but his dry lips parted in a snarl as he said: "What would you give?"

Now this thing happened: Guido, his elbow on the table, his eyes hot with impious fancies, stared across at Signor Malesto, who lolled plumply in his chair, and as he looked it seemed to him that Signor Malesto's fat face shrank into a lined and haggard visage—a mask of gray steel out of which two eyes flamed small and hard; but even as he stared at it this evil mask vanished, and Signor Malesto, amiable and easeful, cried out:

"Tut! tut! I'll not bargain with you, Messer Guido—not I. But for all that learning of yours I'll give you good gold in exchange—fair gold florins of our city here, stamped with the lilies of Florence on one side and on

the other with John the Baptist's head on a dish. A round fortune, Messer Guido, that would mend that ragged coat of yours, pad your starved ribs and buy you, if you would, the lands and palaces of the Buondelmonti and all their enemies—aye, and more! A fortune that would buy you power and love and the envy of others.

Guido lifted the wine-cup to his parched lips and stammered:

"Other men's envy and power and love!"

His lean face brightened. In the dusk of the tavern-room he saw a woman's imperious eyes shining upon him; thoughts he had never known in the cloister and had never unearthed in moldly books quickened in his brain; the thin blood in him ran fiery and swift, sweeping away his old ideals, his old superstitions, his old fears. Fear? He had had enough of fear! It was night now and his courage sang to him; impulses out of savage woodlands, wherein savage men prowled with beasts, leaped in his veins; he was a primeval man for whom the lust of power and envy and love had of a sud-

den been invented. Grim and urgent he stood up in his rags.

"And I would barter," he cried, "all I know —all I learned in the years—let me but live!"

At the shrill sound of his own voice the excitement faded out of him. He glanced over his shoulder fearfully and sank down in his chair. Signor Malesto, with a smile, looked at the young man, studying the haggard face and the eyes that now were furtive and fugitive as those of a wood animal. Suddenly he stretched out his hand and said: "I'll buy."

"A bargain," said Guido with a nervous laugh. He turned himself another cup of wine and drank it at a gulp.

Signor Malesto pushed a thick leathern pouch across the table to his guest.

"You will find the price there," he said.

II

THERE were two men in a sun-lit garden. One of them lolled on a marble bench near the fountain, playing with the rings on his white, fat hands and listening indifferently to his com-

panion, who walked the garden to and fro, talking angrily. The latter was a stalwart, efficient-looking man. In spite of his yellow curls, too long for the fashion of the hour, and his fanciful effeminate dress, there was a masterful air about him that showed his use of warfare. Indeed, in that day no one in Florence cared much to face his sword, for he was Farinata degli Uberti, and only a fortnight had gone by since he killed Buondelmonti, his enemy, and called half Florence to arms. A bold, honorable and reckless man, this Uberti; men feared his sword as women feared his love. As he walked the sun-lit garden up and down he was saying:

"But 'tis not a man's name, Malesto! I tell you he is an impostor! Cascioli—is that a man's name? I tell you it is the name of a battle. 'Twas in my grandfather's time, during the reign of the old Countess Mathildis. There was a battle of Cascioli, and we defeated the imperial vicar and his knights. Who the devil is this Cascioli? Surely you know, Malesto?"

"I know what all the world knows," said the suave little man, curling his legs up on the marble bench and taking his ease. "He calls himself Guido degli Cascioli and he came to Florence a fortnight ago."

"Aye, and old Gian, the tavern-keeper, says he came ragged and foul, with neither horse nor man," Uberti shouted. "Devil take him! Now he rides abroad with twenty gentlemen at his heels."

Malesto grinned. "I should hardly say he rides," said he, "for he straddles his horse as though it were a barber's bench. But as for his foul clothes—tut! tut! He may have come from afar and fallen among robbers. That may happen to any man, Uberti. And he soon bettered his dress and filled again his purse. Now I ask you, dear friend, could he have done that had he not been a man of substance and credit?"

"I do not like these interlopers," said the soldier stoutly. "We want none of them in Florence."

"I'm not Florence-born," said Malesto, smil-

ing up at Uberti with lazy mockery, "although since I've known you I feel at home here."

"Though you be not Florentine, you are a man of race and blood," said Uberti.

"To be sure," said Malesto quietly, "I am of an ancient house and no interloper. But this Guido degli Cascioli, who sweats gold from every pore of his skin—you call him an interloper? Now may the devil send us a score like him! And why should you care whence he comes, from a battle-field or a kennel. He is a lad of mettle—yellow metal."

"He! a lean rogue who cannot sit a horse. He has the hang-dog air. Were it not that he has neither Greek nor Latin nor good fair Italian, I would say (I hope 'tis no sin) that he had the look of a broken priest. And he is to flaunt it in Florence and shame us with his raw wealth. I wonder if the rogue can hold a sword," and Uberti, the best swordsman of his day, laughed and patted the hilt of his weapon.

"Cascioli? Why should he fight?" Malesto asked. "Think you it is for nothing he rides

abroad with twenty swordsmen at his heels? You are no philosopher, Uberti. What are Cascioli's lordship and name to you? As for his Latin—I did not know you had much yourself. And if he talk not like a Florentine and walk with a hang-dog air, why I daresay it is the fashion of his country."

"His sword hangs at his thigh like a distaff."

"The fashion of his country," Malesto said again and always he sprawled easeful and listless, twiddling his rubies.

"They say he has bought the palace of the Buondelmonti," the soldier growled. "Now this is a shame to Florence."

"I am glad you love your enemies," the little jeweled man sneered, sitting up and nursing his plump leg. "The priests advise it."

"The Buondelmontis are my enemies, yes," Uberti said, "and their blood is only a fortnight old on my sword; but I've a mind to do them a good turn and rid them of this adventuring rogue who would stable his painted girls in their palace."

"That would be a good deed and the part of

a Christian," Malesto said softly; "and indeed, dear friend, it is a shame to the gentlemen of Florence that he should have been able to buy the Maddalena from them all. But these women—what says the Holy Book?—they have impudent faces and their feet abide not in the house. A pretty woman, this Maddalena, though I like not these Venetians with red hair. You were the last, were you not, Uberti, before this golden lord came to Florence, in rags as you say, and took her?"

All these things Signor Malesto said musingly, as one who cares not whether he is overheard or not, but speaks to himself; yet there must have been something wicked in the words, for Uberti started like a horse stung with the spur. For a moment he fretted his sword in its scabbard, then he laughed shamefacedly and swore by his saint and answered shortly: "Do you think I'd fight for her?"

"Why not?" Signor Malesto asked. "Why not fight for her? If a man jostles you in the street you will fight him for it. If one lames your greyhound you'll run him through for it.

And to be robbed of Maddalena and not fight for that—well, perhaps you are right. We all have different ideals of honor."

Uberti came close and put his foot on the marble bench. He looked down at Signor Malesto with blazing eyes.

"Honor?" he said, "now by my saint I thought I had too much honor to fight a nameless adventurer for a woman like Maddalena. If I loved her—" he added.

"No one doubts your courage, Uberti," Signor Malesto said suavely, getting to his feet, "but of course the world will talk. Our wicked friends will always crack their wicked jests. But you are right. She is only a woman, this Maddalena, and since you do not love her, it would be foolish to risk your skin merely to stop the laughter of Florence."

Had Signor Malesto been wickedly inclined, had he wished to bring about a quarrel between the young soldier and Messer Guido Cascioli, he could have chosen no apter words. Uberti stared at him a moment in angry perplexity. He was a gentleman and a loyal man; he was

brave and true and simple; but the fashionable honor of his day was a dear thing to him, and moreover he could express himself better with his sword than with words; so when he had gathered at last Signor Malesto's meaning, he felt as though all Florence were mocking him for an unworthy deed. This Maddalena? Yes, for a little while he had owned her kisses. It had been idly done, as a young man ties a ribbon to his sword-hilt and swaggers abroad with it. That was all. He was not at all displeased that this adventuring rogue who had come scattering his gold over Florence should have bought her—as he had bought his bodyguard of hectoring swordsmen. But if men said he, Farinata degli Uberti, feared—if Florence laughed—

He went red then white with anger.

Signor Malesto touched him lightly on the shoulder.

"It is only the gossip of an hour," he said. "People will forget it. A man like you need not care for the idle jests of a moment."

"I will give them something else to gossip

about," said Uberti grimly. "This Cascioli—where is he?"

"One need but ask for Maddalena," Signor Malesto answered, smiling and twisting his rings.

"You shall carry my message to him," said Uberti, flinging out of the garden and hurrying down the steep street that led to Florence. "You shall take it at once. Come, Malesto."

III

THE day was nearly done. It had been an autumnal day, bright with afternoon sunlight. Now the shadows were creeping round the old palace of the Buondelmonti, and the light that entered the narrow windows was faint and broken.

In the great hall, on the first floor, the lamps and wax candles were flaring joyously over white, sprawling women and men who shouted to each other as they drank their wine. The red-haired woman whom all Florence called Maddalena lay on a couch of water-colored velvet, laughing. She had reason to laugh,

this girl who was then too beautiful, for in a fortnight, by the mere expenditure of kisses, she had gained a palace and a fortune in gold florins, lily-stamped. Round her throat there was a triple band of pearls, and somehow or other the warmth of her body seemed to color them with strange fires; the pearl bands round her neck glowed and shifted their colors like lizards on a sun-stained wall. Her dress was clinging and small. In color it was a green so pale it might have been silver. So Maddalena was very beautiful as she lay there, all her muscles relaxed, laughing. They were talking of her lover; always Maddalena laughed and fingered the pearls at her throat.

In the room above, where the dying day fell slantingly through the narrow window, this man who was her lover brooded in a great wooden chair. In spite of the gems and silks upon him, he was an abject figure of a man, lean and haggard and frightened. He bit at his finger-nails as he sat there in the dusk of the room. Then for a little while he drummed on the arm of the chair. His lungs hurt him and

he wanted to cough, but dared not. Somehow or other there was a cold dread about him; it was not exactly fear—it was dread. Now whether he dreaded life, or what comes after life, he did not know. Slowly the dusk in the room deepened into darkness. He could see only the small, narrow window whence a little light entered the room. It was cold and he shivered. From below he heard the laughter of men and women and their boisterous commands to the servants; once he heard Maddalena's voice, clamorous and merry.

"God!" he said and crossed himself.

You will understand that this lean and haggard man, sitting in a dusky chamber, crossed himself and said: "God! O God!"

Now it is quite true that this may happen to any one.

Sometimes in the years we have all sat in dark rooms and called upon Him who sleeps by the camp fire of which the stars are the flickering sparks. We have called to Him in the night; sometimes He has been abroad on other business; sometimes He has answered us.

Both you and I know what it is to cry out of the dark to the God we need. But with Guido, who had called himself Guido degli Cascioli, it was another matter. He thought that God would never answer him. Fear racked him. He was afraid of God, this man who sat there in the darkening room of the old palace which looked out on the Condotta, for he feared he could not repent. He looked back over the sins of his life. They had been so insignificant. He had tried to live straight and true. Perhaps when he was a vagrant child in the gutter, searching slyly for food, he had sinned; that he did not remember; the life he knew began when the old priest had picked him out of the slime and given him food and books. And then? Then the cloister and the study; the discourses he had made, the books he had written, the curse that had sent him, outcast and lost, to wander in the world; and Maddalena? He remembered her eyes—the colorful temptation in her eyes. (Sometimes she would draw his head down to hers and loosen all the wanton glory of her red hair and shade their faces in it

as in a tent. It was very wonderful to kiss her there in the perfumed shadow of that tent; and this he remembered as he sat there in the dusky room cold with fear.)

But was this a sin of which he could repent?

When he thought of Maddalena and her kisses he was convinced that sin had never been invented.

"It is not a sin to love her," he whispered, crouching in the wooden chair in the dark room. "Love is not a sin. God is mistaken."

Then of a sudden a swift fear struck at his heart and at his mind; the old cold dread came upon him. He glanced down, and the silk of his dress and the gems of his sword-hilt mocked him. His thought went back to Malesto and the bargain he had made with him. All this life of his and all this love of his was a lie and based on a lie. Who was Malesto and what was his gold? Was it not devil's gold, that when the dream was over would be but wasted autumnal leaves? And Maddalena's kisses—were they real? Was it not all a trick of the devil to cheat him?

Guido stood up in the dark room. He could feel the life in his body. No, it was not a lie; the tent of wanton hair that Maddalena spread over his face when she kissed him was not a lie —no! And with that he brought his hand down sharply on the hilt of his sword. The gems and the crude-cut gold of it hurt his hand. This physical pain was an antiseptic to thought.

Suddenly— Now, suddenly Guido remembered that he must face a danger in which the twenty bravos whom he had hired to ride at his heels could not help him at all. The old fear drew round him, close and chill as the air of a cellar underground into which one walks from the sunlight. He sank down again into the wooden chair, shivering. Again he began to beat vague marches on the arm of the chair, for the fear that was on him now was physical— the fear of the naked sword. He set his teeth and said: "I will not fight Uberti—I will not! He is a coward to ask me to fight him—I will not!"

From the great hall below there came to him the sound of laughter and merry words. It

was in the great hall that Maddalena sat with gaming men and kissing girls.

Drooping with fear and shame, the man Guido, who had once been a priest, hid his face in his silken sleeve.

"I cannot live this life," he said aloud, "I cannot."

"Why not live it? It is merely a matter of habit."

Guido lifted his head. For a moment he was not quite sure whether some one had really spoken or whether he had imagined the voice and the words. Signor Malesto stood by his chair, smiling, easeful, jeweled, as he always was.

"Is it you?" Guido cried—"you? I did not hear you at the door. Indeed, the door is locked fast."

"Doors and keys and locks!" said Signor Malesto. He was a droll little man in tawny clothes, and he glowed with rubies. "And you think they can keep me out when I wish to serve a friend?"

Although he did not know how Signor Ma-

lesto had entered the room, and although he did not like him, yet Messer Guido gathered comfort and help from his mere presence.

"But what have I to do with this hectoring swordsman?" he asked fretfully. "What quarrel has Uberti with me?"

"Quarrel?" Malesto repeated softly. "Why, 'tis a gentleman's quarrel. He does not like you—does not like the color of your doublet or the shape of your chin, or," and Malesto halted, "he likes Maddalena too much."

His enemy was not near. In the dusk of the night and the companionship of Malesto, Guido found a sort of hectic courage and as well hatred for this Uberti, who had braved him. He said: "Now curse this man, and if it is his life or mine I will kill him!"

"Brave lad!" said Malesto mockingly. "And with what will you kill him! With yonder toy of a gilt sword that dangles at your side? Come, now, Messer priest, have you ever drawn sword in your life? And Uberti is the best swordsman in Tuscany. He would

make but two passes—one across your face for his mark and the second through your heart. Then he would wipe clean his sword and come blithely here to Maddalena. Tut! man, never talk of swords till you can use one."

"With my hands I will kill him!" Guido cried with hysterical rage; but even as he thrust out his arms in a savage gesture a cough took him, and when it passed he was weak and a cold sweat was on him.

"You've a brave heart, but a poor wit, Master priest," Signor Malesto said more seriously, "but I'm not one to go back on a friend in need. You must fight the Uberti and yet you cannot fight. Look you, I was always a helpful man. I have a sword here that even in a hand so weak and unskilled as yours carries death at its point."

Signor Malesto drew his sword and laid it on the arm of the chair.

"It will kill," he said, "of its own good will it can kill; no one can stand in front of it and live. Take it, Master Guido; you shall pay me another time."

Guido took the sword; the hilt of it fitted his grasp as though it had been the little hand of a woman.

"You shall pay me another time," said Malesto. "Sign but this acknowledgment of your debt—write here your name."

"Write my name," said Guido. "But I can no longer write. You best know that, Signor Malesto."

Yet he took the tablet from Signor Malesto's hand, and as he did so the blood jetted from his wrist.

"Awkward lad! Did you not see the penknife hanging to the tablet? You've cut your wrist; luckily a mere scratch," said Signor Malesto, probing the wound with the tip of an ivory pen, "and the blood will serve for ink. Now make a mark here—not that, not a cross—no, my friend; a circle, like that—so," said Signor Malesto.

Guido did as he was bid heedlessly; he was thinking of Uberti. But Signor Malesto gave a little cry of triumph and fluttered his fingers

in the air. His eyes, usually black and dull, flamed with light.

"It will kill?" asked Guido, weighing the sword.

"Have no fear. What your heart bids it do it will do," said Signor Malesto. He went to the door and shot the bolt.

"Come," he added, "come now, Master Guido; the other waits for us."

As they went swiftly down the stairs Guido heard the laughter in the great hall and the voice of Maddalena singing, but he did not pause. Something—and whether this was Signor Malesto or the sword he did not know —was guiding him to his enemy. They crossed three streets and came out upon the Arno. The river in this autumnal time had shrunk to a mere yellow ribbon of water. On the broad sands Guido saw a man pacing to and fro. Even in the dusk he knew him. Hate and fear did so tug at him that he knew this could be no other than Uberti, and casting off his cloak he ran at him, sword in hand, with

all a coward's eagerness to kill. There were words on his lips as he ran. He stammered "Villain!" and other names so foul he knew not whence they came; and "Draw, Villain!" he cried and spat on the ground. The face of Uberti hardened into white anger.

"Fool," he said, "but have your way. I strike but twice—once to set my mark on you —and again to kill."

"I strike but once," shouted Guido, and their swords crossed.

Now, it was even as Guido said, for his sword went straight to the heart of the man he feared —went swift and implacable like a living thing to Uberti's heart; and this one shuddered and fell dead, a look of amazement more than pain upon his face. Guido threw the sword down on the sand. It seemed to him that the thing twisted there like a snake. Then he looked at the dead man and gasped, feeling a pain racking at his side. Signor Malesto stooped and picked up the sword. Perhaps the scene had shocked him, for his face was no longer plump and amiable; it had shriveled into a lean mask.

There was something dark and malign about him; something mocking and obscene in the haggard face and blazing eyes, and as he came toward Guido he limped a little.

Then the great fear which is the fear of death fell upon Guido, and he turned and ran swiftly, and as he ran he babbled old priestly words in Latin. *"Retro Sathanas!"* he cried. He fled he know not whither. A narrow, dark lane; then he came out upon the market of the Mercato Vecchio, at the corner where the bronze *devil* guards the palace Cavolaio. He paused to take breath; a fit of coughing strangled him; he went on feebly.

"This must be the end of it," he said softly.

Now saying these words the ragged man glanced at the squat bronze devil that guards the Cavolaio palace. The broken priest looked at the leering thing of bronze, and a great temptation came upon him. Well he knew what the devil does for his own! Now, should he, Guido, the priest and scholar, call upon the devil, would he not give him all the joys of life?

The great temptation rocked in his mind.

Then, mark you; a strange thing: at that moment he heard voices, the clangor of steel, laughter and the noise of little sandals on the stone flags. A woman's voice said: "Do you love me, Uberti?" "Unto death," a man's voice answered lightly.

Then into the lane of light shed by the Madonna's lamp came three people. One was a serving-man in armor. Then came Uberti, his cloak about his face, so one could see only his yellow hair and the love-knot in his cap. With him the woman. She was tall, lissome, young; she was beautiful—the dying wretch there by the house wall saw that she was beautiful; he saw the beauty in her eyes and the beauty in her wanton red hair.

The door of the narrow house was opened to these people, but the wanton-haired woman paused for a moment on the threshold and glanced down at the ragged figure by the wall. Her eyes met his, and then with a little laugh she entered the house.

Always the bell rang somewhere: the sound

of the bell like some slow-winged bird drifted over Florence; eight, nine—

The dying man reeled; then he fell. His breath came in short gasps; he moved one feeble hand, as though he would say *"Retro Sathanas"*—feebly. The light of the Madonna's lamp was in his eyes. The Madonna looked down upon him and she was neither aloof nor cold.

"Ave—ave," the dying man whispered, "ave Maria—clara—purissima—"

Saying this he died; ten—the last stroke of the bell; it was ten of the clock in Florence.

When day came they found him dead there. He was a broken priest and a man of no significance, so they buried him in a ditch and thanked God that the scandal of his life was ended.

Over the Mercato Vecchio the sunlight fell, flattering the gilt attire of the Madonna and shining on the bronze devil of the Cavolaio.

THE KING OF SCOTLAND'S DAUGHTER

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V

THE KING OF SCOTLAND'S DAUGHTER

I

WHEN with his own hand King James stabbed to death the Douglas in the small chamber of Stirling Castle, I fled oversea with what speed I could, for Scotland was no home for me. In those days there was little truth in the proud saying that none might touch a Douglas or a Douglas' man without coming by the waur. With the murder in Stirling Castle came the downfall of that branch of the house of Douglas to which I was sib. Within three years the earldom was dead and Lord James, who might have propped up his house, was a mumbling, shaven monk in Lindores Abbey.

It was well I stayed not for kiss of sweetheart or the stuffing of a purse, for those who were sent to take me made short shrift of the

Douglas' men; indeed, my fellow, Robert of Liddesdale was cut down in the streets before he could draw sword or cry God's name. I was not near in blood to the Douglas, but being a clerk I stood closer to him than others. Thus I knew many things it were better no man should know, and had they laid hands on me my life had not been worth an *ave.*

It was my purpose to make my way into Burgundy, for it was rumored that Charles, the young lord, was gathering troops to make war on his father, Duke Philip, who was slightingly called the Good. But this came to naught and Charles sulked in the Low Countries. I pushed on, however, toward Burgundy, for I have always held that what I set out to do is worth doing to the end.

I have often wondered in these later years, when I have had time and liking for reflection, why I did not make use of my scholarship, for I was a good Latinist and able in the French tongue. Withal I wrote a clerkly hand and had a pleasant voice. At the expense of a shaven pate I might have had comfort and an

easeful life, and gained, moreover, the salvation of my soul. I was but twenty years of age, however, in that hard year when I fled from Scotland. There was a strain of hot blood in me, too, which did not much incline me to prayer. Even as a boy I was fonder of sword-play than the moral *redes* of Dionysius Cato or the logic of Okam.

It was no small pleasure to find myself foot-free in the world, landless and masterless, to ride forth where I would. Though I had but few crowns in my purse, yet I carried a good sword and rode a stout Flanders mare, and had little fear of the present or dread of the future. Even then I was a big man, strong in the arms and a cold fighter. As I rode along I dreamed right pleasantly of the renown I should win in the wars of Burgundy. And this pleasant dreaming I have often held was my undoing. My great misfortune—though it led to good fortune—befell me in this wise:

The highway that comes into Poitiers runs steeply down a hill, and that morning, it being late in the year and rainful, this road was

heavy with mire. I was riding down this road, dreamfully and heedlessly, with loose rein, when a villain started up by the wayside and wailed or cried something to me. The great Flanders mare I bestrid reared back fearfully, floundered a space and then went down on her neck as you have seen a struck bullock fall. I had thrown myself out of the saddle as she fell, and I dragged at her by the bridle to get her to her feet. She was even then as good as dead, for the blood ran from her ears and nostrils and bubbled from her mouth. I have always thought the cord of life (which runs through the necks of beasts as of men) had snapped from the weight of her fall. Be this as it may, the poor beast was dead, and I stood there, in sorry plight, staring at her limp carcass. Had the bark which carried Cæsar's fortunes come to wreck, so might he have stared.

Him whom I have called a villain lounged near by with a sort of grin, though not ill-natured, on his dirty, black-bearded face. When I thought of the evil he had done me, the grin on his face irked me and I plucked out my

sword. The villain, who watched me narrowly, skipped nimbly away, and cumbered in my great boots I could not follow. When he had put a ditch between us he made me a very low bow and said:

"Quid fit, Domine, quid agitur?"

Somehow it pleased me to learn he was clerkly and no common knave, so I put up my sword.

"Cur curris?" I said grimly, but not unkindly.

"Heus, heus," said the fellow smartly enough. "Cur leus, ut aiunt, prae canibus."

I laughed outright, for indeed he had skipped like a hare. When he heard my laughter he came back readily and stooped and twitched my mare's eyelids.

In all my life I had never seen so complete a rascal as this fellow seemed to be as he stood there, lazily kicking the belly of my dead mare. From head to toe he was in rags, and he looked none the smarter for the dirty cloak that swung jauntily from his left shoulder. He carried no sword, though there was a short

stick in his hand. He had plentiful black hair and a thick black beard. In his dirt and his rags and his leanness he might have moved an older traveler than I was to pity.

Withal his face was so bold and merry and wicked that a young man could but like it.

"What's your name, fellow?" I said.

"I'm a poor scholar, my lord," said he, grinning.

"And what business has a poor scholar on the King's highway frightening good horses to death?" I asked.

The fellow laughed.

"The highway is my room of state," said he. "It is my great chamber and my small chamber—*par Dieu!* It is my castle and my walled town. Seigneur, I am Dimanche-le-loup, but my friends—I make you one of my friends—call me Bar-sur-Aube. I am a gentleman, my lord, like yourself. My titles are all inscribed in the Liber Vagatorum."

With that he laughed, hunched up his ragged cloak and again kicked idly at the dead mare. The action did not please me much, and I bade

him strip off the bridle while I undid the girths of the saddle. The saddle was heavy and I was minded to make the fellow carry it, until I bethought me that my money was in the flap, so I threw it on my shoulder and bade him lead on into the town.

The villain, or, to give him his name of a rogue, Bar-sur-Aube, led me through a tangle of streets to an inn which bore for sign a culverin, the new invention of Master John Bureau, the great engineer. There was a small fire in the inn chamber, by which Bar-sur-Aube, having drunk at my cost, lay down and warmed himself into sleep. The ragged knave!

"Here," thought I, "I am in pretty company!"

I bethought me who I was and who I had been—no mean person if I had my own in Scotland and the black Stuart were not on the throne.

"And here I sit," I thought, "in a dirty tavern with a knave for fellow, not ten crowns in my pocket and no horse—a wretched foot-

man at whom any scurvy groom may throw mud."

Yet, I remember, I ate heartily and drank of the best, and paid the score with my saddle and bridle. And when Bar-sur-Aube woke and had eaten, I played him at dice for my few crowns and lost them blithely and with a sort of desperate thankfulness. It was something that I could be no poorer. As for the villain, he clapped the money on the table to hear it ring and bit it in his teeth, and laughed and shouted and cursed the inn-keeper and called me his brother and Mæcenas.

"And now, brother," said he, "whither will you walk on your legs?"

Degraded to the condition of a foot-soldier as I was, I was still minded to go into Burgundy, but "Verd et bleu!" said he, and "if it's fighting you want, brother, come with me and fight the Poles."

He laughed his bold and merry laugh and caught my hand in his, and swore so friendly by the twenty-one devils that are on the dice that I gave consent and said:

"Then I shall fight the Poles."

At this he laughed again and called me brother.

II

It is with shame and yet with shy regret, I fear, that I look back upon that year in my life when I wandered the highway with Bar-sur-Aube and his vagabonds, for his boast of fighting the Poles was but a trap.

There was a great band of these vagabonds —masterless scholars, homeless priests and broken soldiers—that dwelt in the lands about Poitiers. They were great thieves and rogues. They pillaged the countryside and even the city paid them tribute. Then with full purses they rioted in the taverns, playing dice and drinking strong wines. Villains as they were they were merry men. They would kill a man and take his purse, and in the same moment sing a gay song and even do a kindness to a beggar man.

There was one little dry, dark prudent man, one Francis Villon, out of Paris, the merriest knave and coward in the world, who would sing

a song, either merry or sad, that you would weep to hear it and think no more of evil; but he all the while would be fingering for your purse.

One night I came upon this broken student as he lay under a tree weeping and praying piteously. I thought him a good, penitent man and would have comforted him, but he broke away from me cursing. And that night with John Cornet and Perrenet, the barber, and other villains he robbed the church of Saint Mary in Niort. It was for fear of being thought a coward by his ragged fellows that this poor wretch turned bravo to Heaven, which I thought very strange, and it set me thinking on my own way of life—which was a way of thieving, dicing, drinking and debauching.

That I could not have been a good man seems quite clear, for persons of radical integrity will not be so easily perverted as I was, but when one is twenty and in a strange land, hungry withal and horseless, virtue is not much regarded. And since I lost home and friends

I was reckless and sad. Verily I turned bandit as broken-hearted maids enter a convent. And there was a pleasure in the life I will not deny. To wander along the great white roads, singing—to be masterless, free as the air of the hills, owing nothing to any one but "good morning" and "good night"; to quaff a cup and dance a round with ignoble girls—*parbleu!* it was life. But all this was to end. It was not my fate to go to the fire and the rogues' death in the square at Poitiers. Now, it befell this way.

Gloomy enough with empty pocket and aching head, I sat one night in the tavern of the Pomme de Pin, when this dark little poet, Master Villon, came in, singing in a shrill voice a song in which there was no great harm. He was bold and swaggering, as he always was in liquor.

"*Serpe Dieu!* but you have a hang-dog look, my long Scot," said he, for it was his foolish habit to talk of hanging.

I struck the table with my fist.

"If I hang," said I, "it will not be with

French rogues. I'll back to Scotland and die like a gentleman by the king's will."

With that Master Villon gave a quick look about us as though he feared espial, and came close and whispered:

"I, too, brother Scot, would fain escape from all this. *Serpe!* I am a learned clerk; I am a great poet—*moi!*" and he struck his forehead, "what have I to do with these dogs? I have a good mother—poor old woman!" Saying this, he began to weep and called for wine in a voice of tears.

"Brother Scot," said he when he had drunk, "I must escape from them; and you?"

"For good or ill," said I, "I shall wait no longer on this devil's business."

For the word he spoke of his mother made my heart beat quick and true.

"We must have horses," said he.

"But how?"

"Horses and money—horses and money," he chanted; "and then we shall lead honest lives," and he crossed himself and murmured a *dirige.*

Now in his dark little mind Master Villon

had made a plan, of which I shall say no evil, since it brought me my good fortune. In the street of the Littlefields there dwelt one John Legrant, a goldsmith, very rich, though he was but a thief, insomuch as he bought stolen goods and paid his poor brother thieves but ill. Still he was a man of repute and had ridden abroad this night to the house of the provost.

"It's God's will that a thief should be robbed," said Master Villon, and though I know not if that be good theology, yet, being then young, I consented.

It was after midnight and the moon had gone down when Master Villon scrambled over the garden wall, being light and nimble, and I followed slowly. We gained entrance to the house by a window which I burst open with an iron tool called in our wicked speech "King David." We broke two doors before we came to the strong-room. There we found the treasure-box, with three great locks. There was never a lock that could resist Master Villon's slim, coaxing fingers, and within the half hour he had picked them all three. When he

raised the lid I saw but a pile of canvas sacks, or I should say I felt them, for we were in the dark.

With that, "Hist!" said Master Villon, and pressed so close to me that I could feel him trembling. I, too, listened and heard footsteps, light and quick approaching.

The little poet, trembling and praying, fled rapidly away. I heard the snapping of twigs as he ran across the garden. I stood still. It irked me that I should have periled my soul and gained nothing by it and, as well, I was too big a man to get nimbly through a window. I snatched up one of the bags and drew back into the blackness of the corner, and stood with naked and angry sword, waiting.

First there came a little yellow quiver of light and then the doorway was bright as day, and I saw her standing there, the lamp held high over her head.

I am an old man now and my blood is cold and slow, but when I think of her—standing in the low doorway with the lamplight on her face—my old heart leaps and struggles like the

heart of a boy. (Dear lady with the blue eyes, dear love of my youth, dear face and the everlasting April of your eyes!)

So she stood there with a strange wonder and fear and courage on her young face.

Truly she was a silver girl, for she wore a coat of cloth of silver, her little cap was wrapt round her head with silver cords, and from her girdle hung a silver pouch and dagger; and on all these metal points the light flickered and shone. There was a bright blackness in her hair—there was never hair so beautiful as hers! With a young man's recklessness I would have given my life that night to bury my face deep, deep in the blackness of her hair. She did not see me then. Lightly and swiftly she went forward to the treasure-box. She gave a little cry when she saw it was open and looked fearfully over her shoulder. No one could stand with such a pretty air—with such a curve of the throat and light-poised head. For a moment she stood watching and murmured something which I could not hear, though the voice was sweeter than any voice of woman, save the

voice that sang to me when I was a little child. Then she knelt by the treasure-box. One after one she took up the canvas bags and read the papers tied in the neck. And with all her fear there came a little look of anger in her face. Twice she scanned all the packets and at last gave a little cry, "Oh! oh! oh!"—very sweet, but angry.

Now I know not what was in my heart at that instant, but I threw my sword clanging to the floor and stepped forward.

She rose with a scream, but controlled herself quickly, for I could see the lines of her sweet mouth harden as she set her teeth. I swept her a bow with my old hat (seeing at the moment how ragged the plume was and wishing it were new) and held out the canvas bag which the rogue Villon had tempted me to steal, and said in court manner:

"Your ladyship's humble servant. Is it this you are looking for?"

Her hand stole down to the silver dagger at her waist.

"Have no fear," said I. "I am a knight's son of Scotland and a Douglas."

Her hand twitched as it clasped the dagger; her eyes never left my face; she bore herself with a pretty air of pride and bewilderment.

"A Du Glaz," she said, speaking my name in the French way.

"Hue Douglas, a gentleman's son and bachelor knight, your ladyship's servant."

"And what," said she coldly, "is a Du Glaz doing in the goldsmith's strong-room?"

With that I stood and faced her.

"Stealing," said I. "And you?"

There came a flash in her eyes, but I looked at her steadily and a smile broke over her face —a smile so bright and mystic and sweet that my heart was like water and I trembled.

"I," she said, and the music of her voice made my trouble none the less—"I am no thief. I have come to take my own. Though this wicked Le Grant will not give it to me, still it is my own. If it bears not my name I will not take it. Read!"

I held the writing to the lamp and read: "The trust of Sieur Ogier de Vaucelles for his daughter Catherine de Vaucelles, 1,000 livres."

"Now thank God!" she cried, "I have it at last, for I have great need of it. It is the life of a great lady, Sieur Du Glaz, that you hold in your hand."

I picked up my sword and said: "I would you had greater need of a man's arm and sword."

Then she looked at me musingly.

"There is a Scot at court," she said, "his name is Candé."

"A gray man with a blue scar on his brow?" for I knew the man, though she spoke his name in the French way.

"Yes."

"A true man, John Kennedy," said I. "He put the first sword in my hand."

Again her eyes studied and questioned me.

"He came into France in the suite of my gracious mistress, Margaret Stuart, Princess of Scotland and France."

Saying this, I bowed like a loyal man.

The Lady of Vaucelles looked into my face with true eyes and said:

"The Scots are leal men. Are you leal?"

"For life or death," I said, and dropped on one knee as though I waited knighthood at her hands.

"And will you ride in my service and in the service of the princess of your land?"

"Through life into death, dear lady."

"Then come. Le Grant returns at dawn and we must be well away ere then. There are horses in the stable—cóme."

It was thus I rode away with my lady into the night, knowing not whither and caring not, for I was with her. And the wind in my face was like wine, and overhead the dear stars shone, and in my heart was a little song that sang itself to the rhythm of the hoof beats, and the song was only this: "That I might love you love was made, dear lady—that I might love you love was made" over and over again as we galloped under the stars.

III

Hour after hour we rode along the great highway or through the copsewood by green rivers, and no man stayed us. The sun came up and made a pleasant light in that part of the world. For me it was joy enough to ride by my lady's side, though it were to the world's end, and watch her face and her curls ruffled by the wind.

Now and then she would look at me in a questioning, earnest way, and when I met her eyes she would smile a little and say:

"If you are not a true man, Sieur Du Glaz, it were better I died here."

And always I answered:

"Dear lady, your own hand is not truer to you than I."

Nor was there anything else said between us until we rode into Niort, a very wretched village and half deserted, for the people in these bad years had fled to the cities to die of hunger and the plague. Yet in the high street was a sturdy fellow in a cap who led two fresh

horses. At this sight my lady gave a little cry of content, and from a small house or inn (for I do not remember) there came out a man whom I knew for my countryman, John Kennedy. And he, too, knew me, though I was but meanly dressed and had neither armor nor shield. He said little until my lady had gone away to rest awhile and we were alone. Then he laid his hand on my shoulder—for big as I was he was bigger, but lean—and said:

"And now, Master Hue?"

So I told him how I had met my Lady of Vaucelles, but not all, for I was not so scant of news that I should tell him I was but a bandit.

"I have known you since you were a boy no taller than my thigh," said he when I had made out my story, "and your father was a true man and your mother was of my own blood."

"Yes."

"But you have no cause to love the Stuart."

"So that is where it pricks, Master Kennedy," said I, "but you need have no fear. I ride in the service of my Lady of Vaucelles."

"And she," said he slowly, "is in the service of Margaret Stuart, daughter of Scotland and Dauphiness of Viennois."

"And where she serves I serve, and whither she rides I ride—to the end, John Kennedy."

"So be it," he said in a solemn way and gave me his hand.

Now this great lady was but a little maid of twelve when she was carried into France to be the wife of the Dauphin, who to-day is the eleventh Louis. He was a cold and wicked youth, who never cared for father, mother or wife. It was his pleasure to make the little Scottish maid unhappy, and he sent away all her friends, and when she wept and complained (for she was but a child) he laughed and mocked her manner of speech. Then he whispered evil stories of her until she was brought to despair. And she could no longer rest or sleep, but sat on her bed weeping for those who loved her oversea. Often she said to my own dear maid, the Lady of Vaucelles, who was her tire woman: "Were it not for my pledged

word I would fain—" And here she would break off and sigh, dreaming of her own dear land, the dark forests and the Castle on Stirling Hill. Now that her father, the king, was dead, there was no hope for her in all the world. Louis, her prince, had wearied even of baiting her in his cold, evil moods, and there were those who said boldly that she would suddenly die. Then in her fear and loneliness she consented to the plot that should bear her away.

As we rode on to La Rochelle, my Lady of Vaucelles and John Kennedy made known to me the plan they had laid to save the princess and carry her to England. And it was clear that I, being unknown in the town, would be of great help. Their one hindrance had been want of money, and this was now supplied, and as well they had gained a stout heart and a good sword.

We came to the town at night and they entered, but I lay without until dawn. When the gates were opened I went boldly in, like a stranger and asked for an inn. I made my

dress better by a mail shirt and a silken doublet and a new plume to my hat, and then went down to the harbor.

Near the tower and just beyond the great chain there lay a Spanish galley of sixty oars that I hired to set us down on the English coast. The master, who was a thrifty rogue, knew there was something dark in the business, and made me pay him five hundred livres of my lady's money. The sailing was for midnight, when the tide served, and by reason of the darkness the Spanish captain was to burn a signal torch.

The day went slowly.

At dusk John Kennedy came to me.

"Come," he said, "there is one who would see you."

I am very certain a man can carry two loves in his heart and be the better for it, for though I loved my own dear lady none the less, yet when I saw Margaret of Scotland, right gladly would I have laid down my life, like a carpet under her feet. She was slim and small like a child, with gloomy eyes and a little white

face, very sad, beneath a weight of thick red hair. Of her dress I remember only that she wore a surcoat of saffron-colored velvet set with emeralds; and bright though it was, I think of it always as a dress of mourning. There was something watchful and timorous in her manner that seemed familiar to me. Surely I had never seen this hapless princess before, yet as I looked at her there came to me vague memories of dark forests, of windy camp-fires, of savage cries and the shock of battle. All these things I recalled faintly as one who, wakened of a sudden, calls back a fading dream. Her hands were little and pale, and upon one of them she wore a ring, which was but in itself a rough circle of gold, such as the barbarians fashion, but to me it was more than strange. How this could be I know not—and indeed I have spoken vainly of it to many priests—but the sight of that ring made a fierce confusion in my brain. I could not think of my duty to the princess, and forgot both my Lady of Vaucelles and John Kennedy.

Staring at that ring of witchcraft, there came

into my mind a tangled dream of warfaring men who were yellow and small and wild, of hot fighting and laughter and wine, of little hands, a face dabbled with tears and kisses—and the dream ended blackly in death. It was only for a moment that I let this vision trick me. I looked at the princess with what courage I could, and though her eyes were averted, yet it seemed to me that she knew my thoughts—that she and I were together on some lawless ride in forest glades and over glimmering prairies among the savage hills of another land. I write the thing as it seemed true to me then, but I doubt if there be men wise enough to explain it.

John Kennedy spoke my name and my gracious Lady of Vaucelles said:

"This is a leal Scot."

The princess looked at me with her great, sad eyes, which were green and troubled as the sea. Then she gave a kind of cry, but not loud, and her face went white as a bleached bone. There was silence for a while and none of us dared speak, though John Kennedy

gripped his sword as though he feared I was a traitor and no Scot.

"Leave us alone," the princess said at last.

Her voice made a strange trouble in my heart. Had I been a man of an evil past, just so I imagine I should have been troubled by the sudden memory of a lady I had injured and undone; but that sin I had never on my soul.

"I never thought to see you," the Princess Margaret said softly when my Lady of Vaucelles and John Kennedy had felt the room. "No, I knew not you were alive."

I will not deny that my first thought was that, young as she was and cruelly used, her brain had given way under her sorrow; but upon second thought I knew that were she mad I was mad no less, for the mere sound of her voice was like remembered music to me. She took a tablet from her girdle and gave it to me, saying:

"See, I have written to you again!" And as I looked at it I knew the shaping of the letters and knew that this was her writing and

that I had read it before; yet withal I knew this thing could not be. Was it a dream? The princess spoke aloud the very word that was in my mind.

"Yes, it is part of our dream," she continued. "I dreamed it first and then I wrote it down here. I have seen and known strange things but not like this—not like this. Listen. I will tell you because it is you—because you are the dream."

She sank back in her chair, feebly as women do, and covered her eyes with her pale hand on which was the ring of savage gold—the signet of some great dead king, perhaps; then she looked up at me earnestly.

"You are the dream," she repeated. "You shall hear—but surely you must know! How very wonderful that it should be you! And that you should be—what you are! It is God who has sent you to me now, for I have prayed. Then I wrote my dream on the tablet.

"I was a little girl living in a palace, but it was not in Scotland," here her voice quivered, "but in a land like Italy, by the sea. This was

my dream. And my mother was there, but not like my own mother, for she was a sad, worn woman, who did not speak to me; still she was my mother. Then this land like Italy was full of turmoil and fear for the barbarians had come upon it."

"I know," I cried in spite of myself. "They were the Huns. They had conquered Gaul—" and here I paused shamefaced, for I had spoken the maddest words man ever said and knew not at all what they meant.

"Yes, it was because I sent you the letter and the ring," the Princess Margaret said softly, "and your messengers came and carried me away in a litter; but I did not want to go! There was blood on my dress. It is an awful dream. And now I know. You have come again. Do you remember that night?" she cried leaning forward and staring at me with her strange eyes. "The banquet and the men who shouted and the cries! And I who wept! And when you took me to the tent I went quite mad; and when you lay there heavy with sleep and wine—I killed you. That is

the dream," she whispered, "and you are not dead. You have come out of the dream and I did not kill you."

With this she began to sob very softly, but so bitterly it would have gone to your heart. I stood there silent, for I feared to be infected with her own mad thoughts. Indeed there were moments during her speech when I had been quite as mad as she, convinced, I know not why, that this dream was true and that we had lived it together, she and I, in some night of witchcraft. Now, I am not a learned man, though I have more Latin than many priests of these new-fashioned days, but I hold it for true that I was so swayed with pity that hour in the round chamber of La Rochelle that my mind was not my own, but became merely a mirror for her wild thoughts; and that this is possible and has happened to others I could prove from authentic writers. The pain of her sobbing hurt me so that for a time I knew not what I said or did. Then she smiled a sad little smile and said:

"That it should be you—that you should be

the dream—and should have come to me! And now I am not afraid, for I must pay for the sin I did in the dream and then all will be well."

And that was all, for I went away through the small door that opened upon the harbor.

It was at this door that I lay waiting a little before midnight in a row barge with two men. It was very dark. I heard the men in armor going to and fro on the battlements, and now and then the challenge and answer of the bowmen on the bridge.

The hardest task that can be set a man is to wait in the darkness, and it will pull down the stoutest courage. It was not of failure that I thought. The plot was well laid, for my Lady of Vaucelles was free to come and go as she pleased, and it was in her habit and veiled that the princess was to come forth on the arm of John Kennedy. So I had little fear for the outcome. It was of my own little maid I thought—she who was to stay in Margaret's place and bear the brunt of Louis' cold and cruel anger.

IV

THE signal torch, small but clear, flickered for a moment on the Spanish galley, and I drew my sword and ran up the steps to the little door in the tower. I pushed the door lightly, but it did not yield. It may have been a few moments, but to me, waiting in a hurry of hope and fear, it seemed an hour, when the door was opened craftily from within.

There was no word spoken; only the door swung back noiselessly in the darkness. I dared not advance, for it was my duty to stay by the row barge. I could do nothing but stand there, ready for what might come.

Suddenly as paper curls and crumbles in the fire, the darkness crumbled away. Nor have I ever seen a stranger thing. One moment the black, silent stairs, and then everywhere light and cries and the clang of steel.

He who came first at me was a Swiss, but I ran him through and he fell screaming. Above was John Kennedy. He came down sidewise, shouldering the wall, and with his long sword

stood off two men in leather who fought him from above. In his left arm he held the lady, and by my own dear lady's silver dress I knew it was the Princess.

All this I saw as one sees a picture lighted up in a lightning flash. I shouted as I ran to his aid, and when he heard my voice he cried:

"Thank God! Hue, take her and make haste!"

I took the lady in my arms, and her figure drooped like that of a dead fawn—like one without life.

. . . . . .

"Haste, man, haste! Save her and mind not me."

And this word, the last I ever heard John Kennedy, that true man, speak, came to me harshly over the clang of the swords. Already I had run down the stairs, bearing the lady on my arm, but for one moment I paused and glanced back. I saw the three men—John Kennedy fighting fiercely and like a wounded man, and above them at the head of the stairs I saw one who held a light and smiled; and so

cold and young and cruel was the face that I knew I had seen Louis, the Dauphin of France. With that Kennedy fell. Then we were in the row barge, I know not how, and I held the lady fast and my knaves rowed, for it was life or death for us all. I heard the strings of the arbalests ring and the bolts flew about us in the water. Lights flamed everywhere in the tower, and as we reached the galley the great torchlights flared up on the battlements and bridge. I leaped on the galley, bearing on my heart arm the drooping lady, and with that sixty oars took the water and the galley raced out on the tide, a strong wind filling the sails. Yet, swiftly as we went, we escaped the stones thrown by the huge engine on the bridge but by a man's length.

And now I have to tell the end of my fortune, which was a strange fortune of good and ill, and made, like a Scotch web, of many colors, both gay and sad.

There was a little room built between the two masts, and there I laid the lady gently on a couch and knelt and spoke to her with great

respect. She, poor one, could neither hear nor speak. I called for wine, and when it was brought I sent the varlet away that he might not hear.

"My lady the Dauphiness," I said softly.

My fear overcame the duty I owed her. I raised her in my arms and loosed the silver pins that fastened the veil about her head. When it fell away a great sob shook me and I kissed the white face—for this was no princess, but my own gracious Lady of Vaucelles. Nor can I tell the tumult in my heart when I saw, there in the dim light, not the red, thick hair and unhappy eyes of Margaret of Scotland, but her dear face and all about it the blackness of her hair.

"Hue, Hue," she cried and hid her face against me.

"There, there," I whispered as to a child and as my mother used to speak.

"Hue, oh, Hue—and she—my lady—she—"

And she shuddered and drew away from me and covered her face and sobbed.

"I wanted to die for her, Hue, and I could

not even die for her. No, not even that was to be! And now it is too late to save her, too late! Ah, you do not know—"

"It was Louis?"

"No! no! We were waiting, my lady and I, until it should be time, and my lady was praying. Suddenly she came to me and kissed me and said: 'I have been very wicked. I gave my pledge to my father and my God that I would be the true wife of my lord, the Dauphin, and if he kill me yet I will not break my pledge.' I prayed her by her peril and ours, but she said: 'I will die a true wife.' And when Candé came she had no other word for him."

"She would not go, and we—"

"No, no," said my lady softly, "we must not blame her. Oh, had you seen her, Hue! 'My God has spoken to me, dear friends,' she said, 'and I must not go. You and this brave knight must go, and when you are in safety I must tell my Lord, the Dauphin, I have sinned against him in my heart.'

"We knelt to her and even Candé wept."

Once I have seen her and once I have seen the Dauphin, and I would give my right arm could my sword reach his heart.

Now, the story of my lady was this: Even as they knelt there came a shrill voice, crying, "Eh, mistress, why not now? Tell me now!" and Louis was there, laughter on his evil face, and men with lights and weapons came running up.

And John Kennedy with his brave heart and true sword did fight his way out and bring my lady to my arms—and died.

. . . . . .

It was long, long ago, and though for many years my dear lady made my life beautiful with her love, yet we were never lightly gay like other lovers. Always we were in sorrow for that unhappy lady who died that night we would have saved her, and though such things are not said in courts, we knew it was by Louis' hand she died.

And this knowledge and the sorrow made us very humble in our love and very close to each

other. They are both in heaven now—my gracious lady and the princess she served. And I am old and I wait, as on that dark night at Rochelle tower, for the door to open.

MY LADY GREENSLEEVES

VI

MY LADY GREENSLEEVES

I

ALREADY it was dark on the moors, the brown slopes drifting away into the endless, monotonous twilight.

Toward the little pass which even then was known as Scarthe Nick a vagrom caravan marched wearily. There were lean horses plodding ahead, training low-wheeled carts. Certain dark men, dressed in bright-colored, ragged clothes, spoke to the horses confidentially. Starved dogs hobbled faithfully under the wagons. Women and their young, dumb and watchful, in the wagons; women with babies on their backs; women with clinging children made up the end of the caravan.

There were perhaps twenty people in this little company. Slow-footed, watchful, they crossed the brown moorland toward the pass

in the hills. There was something Oriental about these people. In the first place, the meager horses dragging the carts followed one after the other as camels go across the desert sands. Then, too, the men, who were small, swarthy and sly of look, spoke to the horses as though they were speaking to friends who could understand. And the dark-eyed women, their children trailing at their gowns or lying on their shoulders, walked lightly on as those who see in the naked night the mirage of palm trees, spring water and a spreaded tent.

Of all this company it was plain neither man nor horse, woman nor child cared for the roughness of the road across the moors or the menace of the darkening twilight. They seemed to face life as it was, caring not what might come to them, content even though beyond the nick in the hills toward which they journeyed death waited. Perhaps death was a common thing among them. Here, in their wayfaring, a horse might fall in his rope harness or a woman might drop dead, the baby still packed on her back; a man might die from a knife stab or be

hanged high on a gallows; some old wife of the little caravan might be tied to a green stake to die among the flaming faggots, and all this was neither life nor death—it was destiny.

The little caravan crossed the moorland, took the pass, trailed down slowly into the dale. They were silent all. No one of the black-eyed little children wailed; the dogs did not lift their voices; the women, swaying as they walked, did not speak; there were only soft sounds of the horses' footfalls on the turf, the creaking of old wheels and the slight noise of the men whispering to the horses.

A little moon came up in that Yorkshire sky; it was thin and small and curled like the cutting from a thumb nail; still it made a flickering light down the slope of Wensley Dale and fell vaguely upon the four towers of Bolton Castle.

Now that the road ran down hill, the little caravan went neither faster nor slower; always the men whispered to the horses, and the wagons creaked as they journeyed, and the women went lightly but firmly as those who go toward the mirage of tented rest. As they

descended the hill the darkness of the woods was all about them. The road they followed was rough. One man went ahead with a torch. He whispered back guiding words to his companions and to the horses.

So they came to the village. There were only a few thatched cottages bordering the green and huddled beneath the walls of the castle as though for protection. It was a rough and dreary little hamlet—merely the kennels for those who served the castle folk. In every cottage save one the hearth fires were covered and all was dark. The exceptional cottage stood at the far end of the street against the castle wall. The door was open and the light came out of it through a red and smoky fog. As the little caravan approached two brach-hounds ran out, yelping angrily. Then the lean dogs of the caravan gave cry.

The figure of a man showed in the foggy doorway.

"Down, Blanche! down, Nell—heel, you bitch!" he shouted.

Slowly the two hounds, with drooping ears,

came to heel, while the four curs under the wagon yelped and jeered at them.

"What's all this?" the man asked, striding swiftly into the road and catching one of the dark, vagrom men by the shoulder. "What the devil is all this?"

He glanced back at the halted train of wagons and beasts, of furtive men and child-bearing women.

No one answered him, but the man who had been the torch bearer stepped softly to the second wagon and lifted the cloth that tented it round.

"Lady!" he said—"lady!"

Now, he did not say lady, but a strange word known in their tongue, which is Devla.

"Gula Devla," he repeated softly.

The little moon that shone upon Bolton Towers and the cowering village beneath it was still small, but the stars had come out to help it and they made a brave light in that part of the world. So one might see the small woman who leaped lightly from the low-wheeled cart and whispered to the man at the hub. Some-

thing he said in his own speech by way of answer, and she smiled at him brightly.

While they were talking another man came into the lighted square of the doorway. He was small and dark and a black cloak hung from his shoulders. He made a strange gesture and cried:

"Come within, Sir Richard! Have you no fear of God that you talk to people in the night?"

"People! Aye, I care not much for people who go abroad o' nights, but here are friendly dogs and good honest hoofs," said the man who had come first from the lighted cottage; "and there is no witchery here! Is there, Blanche?" he asked, with a huge laugh out of his deep lungs. "Is there, lass? Nay, heel! heel! I say. Will you let that lean cur be? Down, Nell!"

This was a big-bodied man, thick and efficient through shoulder and breast; the hair on his head curly and long, and he wore yellow mustaches and a beard, short-clipped but strong, on his chin. He had been fumbling his

brach-hounds' ears as he spoke to the short, dark fellow in the doorway; now he added:

"These poor vagabonds—man, you see witches and devils everywhere! But that's your business, isn't it, Hopkins? Well, every man to his trade! Heel, Blanche—Nell!" he cried sharply to his wayward hounds, and as they slunk to heel he said laughingly: "Ye rogues! 'tis plain ye were bred in France."

"My lord!"

"My lord!" repeated the big man, busy with his hounds. "Nay, not yet. I am Sir Richard Scrope, at your service," he added, for as he raised his eyes upon the girl who spoke to him there came back to him the breeding of the court; so he said again, "At your service," and swept her a bow with his big hat. Now the little night wind in the valley lifted his yellow hair and made him good to look upon.

The girl was slim and tawny; her eyes were very dark, the color of midnight water, which is neither gray nor black nor blue, but all of these colors; and her hair was sun-stained, like

blighted corn, which is at once yellow and red and brown. Her dress also was red of hue, and both at the waist and at the throat a faint light sparkled as though it had fallen upon copper or gold. The reddish dress about her was coarsely woven, so that the straws whereon she had slept still clung to it. The torch bearer who had wakened her stooped and brushed the straws away. She, unheeding, looked at Sir Richard and at his crouching dogs; then she said again as one who will not be gainsaid:

"My lord—for lord you shall be! Nay, we are but poor folk, too poor for your great courtesy. We are wanderers over the earth by reason of our sins. But we know the future —and you shall be a lord!"

"Do you hear, Hopkins?" cried Sir Richard, turning to the cloaked man in the doorway of the lighted cottage. "'Tis more than you ever promised me, and you have burned more witches than I have pipes of tobacco. A lord!" he added gleefully, for the thought that he was to be a lord pleased Sir Richard Scrope. He looked at the girl and laughed.

"Sir Richard," said Hopkins softly, and he came forward into the dark doorway, "go no further into this talk. 'Tis the mad Papist blood of you that draws you into this danger. Your eyes are blinded and you cannot see. This girl is a witch—nay, see the dogs crouching behind her! 'Tis of the mad dog's foam she makes the witch draught, spuma canum. All the ancients in witchcraft know it—dog's spittle and the spurging of a dead man's eyes. Come away, Sir Richard."

All this the dark little man said eagerly, but as though he were urging Sir Richard to do the thing he bade him not to do. There be men who can speak with this double urgency. It may be that Sir Richard felt the treachery in his words, for he turned on him and said with only a slight laugh:

"John, John, my base-born cousin—John, how long would you weep if indeed I came to evil to-night? Nay, man, never protest. Bolton Castle is a good fee, but Cromwell's day is over and the brewer's son is a poor twig to hang to. Let be, man, let be. I came to you

to-night in a good friendly spirit to drink a cup and bid you to my wedding to-morrow, though my Lady Greensleeves loves you not."

While these words were spoken Hopkins had hunched his cloak about his close-cropped head. He said calmly enough, but with a touch of sneering sullenness, "I did not speak of my Lady Greensleeves;" and with this he held his peace and warned Sir Richard no more, nor did he look at the red-gowned girl who stood watching them.

Now Sir Richard, both because he felt no hate for any man and because the wine was in him, touched his base-born cousin on the shoulder in a friendly way and said:

"Man, you are witch-mad—you should be blooded," and with this he went gayly up to the girl and took her hand. " 'Tis a little hand, mistress," he said, "and soft for a vagrom girl of the night."

He laughed and would have kissed her, for wine made him ever merry and kissful; but the girl drew back. There was fear in her eyes, and wonder. She said, "Oh!" and then, with a

little shuddering cry, "no!" she covered her face.

"You mad girl!" cried Sir Richard, for the wine was in him, "you tell me I'm to be a lord and you will not kiss me!"

The lady—for though her people called her Gula Devla, which is as though one should say Gracious Queen, yet the word lady is the sweetest in the world—the lady, I say, took her hands from her face and threw back her head so that the light shone upon her red hair and the copper jewels round her throat, and said certain words. Her voice was soft and strange. It was as though it were a voice of desert winds or the voice of silver waters rippling down far-away hills. What she said was this:

"You must not mock me, for you do not know. You will never know. I never thought to meet you, and yet I knew it was to be."

Sir Richard, seeing only folly in her words, toyed with the ears of his brach-hound. He was a slow-thoughted man, and if he gained any meaning from her words it was but vague;

so he tugged lovingly at Blanche's ears, thinking, it may be, of my Lady Greensleeves. Hopkins, his lean jowls covered, glowered blackly out of his cloak, now at the girl and now at his high-born cousin. The man who held the torch leaned against the wheel of the cart; the lean dogs and the women and the children and the dark little men watched, huddled under the blanket of the night.

"It is very strange," said the girl softly. She went close to Sir Richard; she breathed so quick that the copper coins jangled and clinked at her belt. "You don't remember me?" she added with slow entreaty.

"Remember?" Sir Richard repeated with a slight effort at thought; then he laughed and groped for her hand. "There are so many pretty girls in the world. I'm no saint, like my Cousin Hopkins, but by our Lady herself I do not remember. Where was it?"

"No, no," she said dreamily. "I have spoken too soon."

Hopkins watched her shrewdly, a sneer on his cruel mouth.

"Down, Blanche! Heel, Nell! The dogs are fey to-night," said Sir Richard.

The girl touched his wrist. The tenderness had gone out of her. She was bright and caressing and hard as a ruby—or a woman who knows she lies. There was a false and coaxing flattery in her face; in her voice there were unreal tears and sorcery. She went to her knees.

"Pity, my lord," she said. "We are but poor wandering folk, homeless, masterless, hearthless. Always we must wander. We are unhappy Egyptians, and because when the little Christ and His Mother came to Egypt our fathers would not kneel to them we have been sent forth to wander under their curse. Pity, my lord—for the gift of the future is mine and lord you shall be—pity and let no harm come to us in your town. We are many —weak women and children at the breast and men who do no harm. Let us tarry here and pass on. Nay, my lord," she cried, for Hopkins was whispering to his high-born cousin, "have no fear, for I can see the fate above you. Your fate has led me here. Listen, my lord:

the golden hand in the cloud, and that is your fortune! But mine I know not—mine I do not know!"

Sir Richard turned to her and swept her a bow with his tipsy hat.

"Mistress, it was ill done of your ancestors," he said, speaking more like a courtier than a man, "to show no courtesy to our Lord and the Lady His Mother when they came to your country, but that is not an unusual fault. There be Puritans here in Yorkshire," said he, looking at Hopkins, "who are no better. Be not afraid. Dwell here in peace."

"Thank you, my lord," she said, looking at him with quiet eyes.

Sir Richard called for his horse and swung himself into the saddle. The Egyptian girl and Hopkins stood looking at each other. They could hear the clatter of the horse's hoofs on the stony road that mounted to the castle and the baying of the home-going hounds; over all a blithe voice singing:

"For oh, Greensleeves is all my joy!
And oh, Greensleeves is my delight!

And oh, Greensleeves is my heart of gold!
And who but my Lady Greensleeves!"

II

STILL singing, Sir Richard rode into the courtyard of the castle. He spoke cheerily to the old servant who took his horse; right cheerily he greeted his old uncle, who sat over his wine.

"And my Lady Greensleeves?" said Sir Richard.

"You'd not think of disturbing her to-night? Sit down, Dick," the old man said. "The wine grows better as the night wears on. And what have ye been doing to disgrace me to-night?"

"I, uncle? I've been trying to undo the sins of your youth," said Richard, grinning at the white-haired old gentleman. "Uncle! uncle! Where did you learn your wicked ways?"

"You've been to the village?"

"Aye. I went to see Master Hopkins, my virtuous cousin."

"Cousin!" cried the old man angrily. "He's no son of mine! 'Twas all a lie of that jade

Moll Hopkins! An old story and an old lie!"

"It was doubly kind of you," said Sir Richard with a disbelieving grin, "to keep a roof over her and send the whelp to the schools, where they made a black Puritan out of him."

"Charity," said his uncle, emptying his glass.

"Cousin or not," said Sir Richard, "he's an ill shoot; but I bear no grudge, though he did his best to oust us from the old home."

"Had Noll the brewer lived he might have succeeded," his uncle put in; "but the bad days are over and the king will come again."

"A glass of your wine, uncle! To the king!" Dick cried, and when they had drunk the toast he added: "So I said to my cousin that I bore him no ill will and bade him come to the wedding."

"Here!"

"Aye, he shall drink a cup. I would have all the world merry to-morrow."

"You'll never make him merry, the crop-haired rogue," said the old gentleman. "Wine does a bad heart no good. They call him the

witch finder. 'Tis an ill trade, that of burning old women, and shows a black heart. Son of mine—no!"

"Let be, uncle, let be," said Sir Richard, "and drink to the bride. To-morrow all the world shall be merry, witches and witchfinders, too, if I have my way," and with that he laid down his glass and, bidding the old man think of the sins of his youth, went blithely from the room.

Of the four towers of Bolton Castle there were lights only in the one looking toward Scarthe Nick. Up the winding staircase of this tower Sir Richard went singing until he came to a door, behind which he heard laughter and the chatter of girls' words. He knocked and the door opened a hand's breadth.

"'Tis I," he said meekly to the old woman who opened.

"'Tis he," repeated the old woman to those within.

There were shrill cries and laughter and then a voice:

"Sir Richard, indeed! Bid him begone,

nurse. It is too late for a lover and too early for a bridegroom."

"Nay, you do me wrong to treat me so discourteously," said Sir Richard, pushing the door. "My pretty bride, may I not see the finery and—hey, what's all that?"

For Sir Richard had no more than stepped into the room and caught a glimpse of his Lady Greensleeves, gorgeous in silver and green finery, than her maids fell laughingly upon him and bustled him out as irreverently as though he had been Tom of Coventry himself. Whereupon he betook himself to bed and slept as best man may who awaits his wedding dawn.

III

Now, when Sir Richard, leaving the little village, rode toward the castle singing, Hopkins and the gypsy girl stood looking at each other. The man lowered his eyes first; he hunched up his black cloak and said:

"We must talk together, you and I. You have said too much or too little, my girl. If you know the future we must talk together."

"Yes," said the girl, and a smile was in her eyes, as though she had indeed read this man's future.

"Then come you in and sit by my fire," said Hopkins. "You have nothing to fear, gypsy though you be."

The man turned on his heel and went toward the lighted cottage.

"I know I have nothing to fear," the girl said. She glanced back at the little caravan. The dark men were alert; the lean dogs, their heads on their paws, drowsed watchfully; she signed to them and followed Hopkins. The cottage into which they entered was better than its neighbor by reason of the wooden floor, the open fire and the case of books hung upon the wall. The girl's eyes went instinctively toward the books. Yellow and somber they leaned against each other—blocks of mystery and terror and power. She knew what things were done with books. At York an old man in a wig had read for a few moments out of them, and three of her men were taken from her and hanged. Why? Ah, that she did not know.

The books had willed it. The books, too, had willed that an old woman should be burned as they journeyed through the Ayescarthe valley not a fortnight gone. Well did the gypsy girl know her own power, for hers was the kingdom of the past and the future. What had been was like a landscape across which she could see men and the nations of men moving; the future was like clay in her hands. But the present—in the present she walked as one walks in a fog, searching; and how could she, helpless to guide herself, guide the people of her caravan? She was leading them through an unknowable land, wherein strange things happened to them and death caught them at sudden turnings.

She did not fear the cold wind on the moors; neither did she dread the strangling blackness of the nights nor the mobs who harried them in the towns. She feared only one thing—the death that came by fire or water or rope when men read to them out of books.

"And he shall be hangit; and she shall be burned quick; and the child shall be drowned,"

the men set to judge them decreed, and because it was written in the books, even so it was.

Knowing these things, the gypsy looked sideways at the case of books on the wall of Hopkins' cottage, and fear came upon her and she knew she was afraid.

"Sit there," said Hopkins, pointing to the settle by the fire.

The foreign girl took her place quietly, though her eyes went from him to the books and back again.

"You must not judge me by my reputation," said Hopkins. Going to the door, he made it fast with an oaken bar and came again. "If I hunt witches 'tis my livelihood, but I've swum many a brave woman so that, sink or swim, it was proved she was no witch. Witchcraft is devil's work and very infamous," he added, "and I have the lord protector's warrant to search it out and bring it to punishment."

"It is in the books," she whispered.

"The law sleeps there, but it depends upon me to waken it," said Hopkins—he threw back

his cloak and sat by the gypsy girl on the settle —"or to let you and all your people go from here in peace."

"But the gentleman who rode away promised us—"

"He—he promise you safety when I say you are a witch and give the word against you and your Egyptians?" Hopkins said, wagging his cropped head at her and frowning. "Nay, mistress, you come of a cursed race. We have heard of your people ere now. And blessed work has been done. Two were burned at Normanton and three were hanged at York—a blessed day," said Hopkins, and quoted Holy Writ.

(Now, he who first quoted Holy Writ to serve his turn was not called a Puritan, but the Father of Lies.)

"They who work iniquity!" he said softly, and rose and stirred the charred wood on the hearth.

In his black clothes, with his black cropped head and his black face, he had the look of something evil that crawls out of dark corners

at night. The foreign girl drew back, shuddering.

"Show me your power," commanded Hopkins, leaning over her. "Tell me what you told my cousin."

"Your cousin!" said the girl wonderingly. "He is your cousin!"

Her eyelids fell and a little shiver ran over her body. She brooded with shut eyes for a moment; then she drew herself up, laughing.

"You forget I know the past as well as the future, Master Hopkins," she said and stood up, a slim, autumnal girl, all darkly red and yellow from hair to hem, as woodlands are when summer is dead. "What would you have me do? What would you have me read for you in the future or the past? Give me your hand, Master Hopkins—so—so," she said, taking his hand in hers. "Let me see the lines."

"You gypsy witch," Hopkins said quickly and drew his hand away, "do you think I care for such mummery!"

The foreign girl was watching him now with keen and sudden understanding. She did not

fear the somber books leaning against each other in confidential mystery; she feared nothing any more, for now she knew the man.

"There was a woman—she was burned in Essex," said Hopkins, going to and fro in the little room. "I found her. She could send death where she would. She used to beat the ground with vipers—*vivo serpente*—and make a circle. Then would she make a cross of larch twigs and toss sand in the air, and out of it—"

Hopkins paused suddenly.

"What comes out of blown sand?" he asked sharply.

"Death," said the gypsy; "death comes out of the blown sand, but it falls here or there—nay, who knows where it falls? That is the wild death. We call it the death that cannot see. It goes out blindly and strikes and kills, but it knows not whom it kills or why. That is death at hazard, Master Hopkins. The blind death!"

It was growing cold in the little room. Hopkins threw some logs on the fire and

waited until the flames caught them; then he said to the Egyptian woman:

"Like the arrow that flyeth by night."

"That is not our way," the girl said. "We send death where we will."

"There's a man has wronged me," said Hopkins darkly. "He robbed me of my birthright. To-morrow he will rob me of the woman who should be my wife. And he is a rebel and a papist—a slave of the scarlet woman. He were better dead."

The fire was very bright now and threw a red color upon his face. The girl, studying that face, did not know (for she could not read the present) whether this man lied or thought he spoke the truth. She could see that he was unhappy, and perhaps the unhappy man who turns to crime is not wholly bad. It may be that he was not wholly unjust. If the marriage laws had done him wrong before he was born, had he not the right to take his revenge where he found it? Life may have been given to him merely to set things straight. Even his dark, vindictive creed may have seemed

true to him. He may have thought as he went on from crime to crime he was doing not merely the lord protector's work, but the Lord's as well. There are men like this; indeed, there are many men like this.

"He were better dead," Hopkins repeated, "for he is predestined to damnation and—"

"That is beyond me," said the girl. "I know only life and death."

"And to-morrow he marries this lady," said he, "this green and silver girl—his Lady Greensleeves."

The gypsy girl stared at the fire. It seemed to her that she saw a girl in silver and green riding along a pleasant highway, laughing; she saw a man who had Sir Richard's eyes and the man knelt to her—not to the girl in silver and green, but then he vanished into the dark and came no more; all this the Egyptian girl saw in a vision of the flaming logs. It seemed to her that all her life and in many lives she had loved this man, and she thought that perhaps she might find him in some other life, where they were both but nameless ghosts, adrift in

time. Then above all she knew that she hated the girl in green and silver who had come between them. She stood up feverishly.

"And to-morrow he marries this lady," said Hopkins.

"I will do what you bid me," she said and plucked at the wool of her gown; "but quick, man, quick—give me water and clay!"

Hopkins caught her wrist.

"You will kill him?" he asked, his voice shrilling into eagerness. "You can do it? It was done in Islington in Elizabeth's time. It cannot fail!"

"It cannot fail!" the Egyptian answered, looking straight into his flushed, dark face; "it must not fail!"

Though the woman throbbed with a febrile, quivering force, perhaps the man was the more nerve-strung of the two; still with an effort he got himself in hand and said quietly enough:

"If you do fail, my gypsy, I'll have you burned within three days; and as for him, the Lord's vengeance can wait."

Saying this, Master Hopkins went to the

trough of water by the cottage door and brought her water in a wooden dish. Then he went again into the night and returned with his hands full of reddish clay. As he entered he said half to himself, as one learned man speaks to another, "Now, Adam was made of red-colored clay;" and in this phrase there was no irreverence, only a steadfast belief in what should be. Darkly evil as he was, this little man had faith, and like the other one who had faith, he trembled.

Standing there near the fire, the Egyptian girl was flame-colored from head to foot—hair and gown and tawny feet. Her eyes were closed and she was swaying to and fro a little, repeating swift, mumbled words. There radiated from her such a force of light and heat and will that the Puritan dared not come near her. He laid the clay in the wooden dish of water and drew back toward the darkness of the door.

The girl began to knead the clay and water. Always murmuring alien words, she sank down by the settle and kneaded the clay. Then

when the clay was supple under her fingers she shaped the figure of a man.

"See, I have made the man," she chanted softly. "Man I make and he is man, and I breathe into his mouth and he breathes, and I kiss his lips and he loves and suffers, so now he may die."

Having kissed the image and breathed upon it, she held it toward the fire.

Hopkins came to her, his lips wide open, his teeth clinched.

"He will die if you cast it in the fire?" he asked harshly.

The lady of the Egyptians drew a knife from the folded wool about her breast and made with it a gesture of destruction.

"No. I must cut it here where the heart is, and then he will die at once," she whispered softly, "and dying, he will know *I* gave him death."

"I would not have him die too soon," said Hopkins. "He should have time for repentance. 'Tis always a chance of salvation."

"I know not these things," the vagabond

woman said for the second time. "I know only life and death and the mystery which is greater than they."

"He will die slowly should you cast this image in the fire," said Master Hopkins. "It was done in Islington."

"Yes," she said, and looked at him.

"Pain will creep over him—eat into him slowly—then he will die," said Hopkins; he caressed the dripping clay figure with his hand. "It will be for his soul's good or a warning for others. Lay it there by the embers, woman, and little by little thrust it into the fire. And as the fire eats the image it will burn away his life. Is it true? Answer me, gypsy!"

"What you have said is true."

She lay the clay thing in the white ashes near the fire.

Hopkins put on his black cloak and went to the door. Without he saw the drowsing caravan. Day was breaking. Already the light flickered over the four towers of Bolton Castle. Even as he stood there looking it was day. The sunlight made a pleasant warmth

in his body, and he laid aside his cloak as he entered the cottage.

"Slowly, my Egyptian witch," he said, "slowly. I would not have him die too soon. How long will it take?"

"How long will the fire burn," the girl asked, kneeling by the hearth, "and how long will your hate last? Let his death begin now."

"Fire purifies," said Hopkins. "Let him feel the fire, but do not cast the image into the flames until you hear the bells ring—the wedding bells. Then let death take him," and he went to the door, for the room seemed clogged with heat. There was a grim look on his face. He glanced up at the castle. There was sunlight on the towers. The windows looking toward Scarthe Nick glittered in the morning light. The man's lips curled sensuously; there was a great hope in his sleepless eyes. With the air of one who has life and death in his hands he turned to the crouching girl by the fire and said: "You heard me, Mistress Witch? Do as I have told you and you have nothing to fear."

"No," said the girl softly. "Now I have nothing to fear."

"He must die with the ringing of the wedding bells. Wait you here till I come again," said Hopkins, and he took the road to the castle. He was a small figure of a man, all in black, and he stooped a little as he went up the castle road.

When he had gone the Egyptian girl picked up the clay image and looked at it. It was but a shapeless thing, rough with white wood ash. Perhaps only Hopkins could have seen —perhaps only hate could have seen in it a resemblance to Sir Richard Scrope of Bolton Castle. Yet it was the image of a tall, stalwart man. The gypsy flicked the white ashes from it. The clay was hardly dry even at the tips. For a moment she let the thing lie idly in her little brown hand. She was thinking of other things—strange things: dim hills and the rush of herds; a strong man's kiss and the thrust of a bull's horn that cut her like a scythe; and with that came a vision of clanging swords

and bright torches, cries and a man—always the man.

So often death had come to her and breathed upon her and passed that she did not know whether life were not the mere shadow of it. Surely life was only the glimmering window pane through which she saw the landscapes of the past, where they had walked together, he and she. She lifted the little image to her lips and kissed it softly. Even as she held it to her lips there came a sudden brazen noise in the air—the clamor of bells ringing.

The sound of the bells beat about her like a storm, and she gave a little cry as of a woman hurt. With this she crushed the clay thing together in her hands. Deftly her fingers molded it, making a darkling little effigy; then with quick mockery she blackened it with soot from the chimney place. She scanned it in the firelight. It was grewsomely like Hopkins, more grimly like a man that once went groping through the streets of Florence long ago.

"Go!" she cried, with a shrill cry, and tossed it among the flaming logs and ran from the cottage. In the street her dark-faced people came about her and spoke to her; the lean dogs crept close, whining comfort; and at that moment the clay image crumbled into broken shards and dust.

IV

THEY kept the old fashions at Bolton Castle; the wedding was in the young of the day.

"We'll have no new-fangled Puritan weddings here," Sir Richard's uncle had said. "We'll keep to the old way of the house."

Sir Richard laughed and said yea, though his Lady Greensleeves ruffled and strutted a little, as ladies will, but was ready as he was for the wedding morn. Now that Cromwell, the brewer, had taken with him to the grave his ignoble ambition and his ignobler fear, the world went better in England. Men began to feel that liberty was not put to bed forever. Though the dreary Richard Cromwell was to maunder through a year or two of life,

folk took courage. The crop-head could not rule forever. Clergymen and priests, who had been hunted like foxes, came from their hiding places. The good Father Clare came from France—'twas a bold venture, too, as things went—to marry Sir Richard and his Lady Greensleeves. So they were there in the great hall at Bolton Castle, the old uncle fumbling his ruffles, Sir Richard taking his morning drink and humming the song he had made of his lady, the old priest bent and brooding in a great chair.

"Is the chapel prepared? Are there flowers?" asked the old gentleman.

"Chapel and priest are waiting," said Sir Richard, "but the bride—it lacks but five minutes of the hour."

"The ignoblest moment in Cromwell's life," said Father Clare out of the depths of some reverie, "was when out of fear he refused to be king."

"A king—he!" cried the old gentleman, catching fire.

"Come! come! To the true king!" cried

Richard. "One cup to the true king and one to the bride!"

As they set their glasses down my Lady Greensleeves came into the room—a tall girl, with dark eyes and a laughing face. So bright she was and the lace of her gown was so picked up with silver points you would have called her a silver girl.

The ladies and maids of her service flocked about her as though she were something too precious to be left alone. A few gentlemen of the neighborhood completed the company, for the marriage was private. Cromwell II was not very terrible, but Sir Richard was careful for the old priest who had come to serve him in this need. The little company went to the southwest tower, where then was the chapel. Father Clare went first, then the old gentleman, giving his hand to my Lady Greensleeves, and Sir Richard followed. There was very little light in the chapel. The candles were lighted on the altar. The priest took his place.

Sir Richard paused at the door, permitting the gentlefolk to pass.

"Have you bid them ring the bells?" he asked the old serving man, who had been long in the house.

"There be four lusty lads at the ropes," said the old man.

"Then, when Father Clare has said his last word, let the bells ring, old John," said Sir Richard.

Handsome, young, strong, gallant, he went to his bride. He had loved her well and long. There was not a thought in him save thoughts of her as he went forward, knelt for a moment at the altar and then rose to take his place by her side.

My Lady Greensleeves slipped her hand into his—a little hand gauntleted far above the wrist, with silver broidery on the glove. Still, beneath the glove he could feel the warmth and loving approach of her hand. He never forgot that moment. It was as though some dumb little animal had crept into his hand ask-

ing for shelter and love and protection—her little gloved hand!

The good priest was telling them their duties to each other. All Sir Richard knew was that the little hand was claiming him. Of what Father Clare said he heard not a word, but the little hand was eloquent; he could feel it fluttering under his fingers like a nestling bird.

"I love you," he whispered.

My Lady Greensleeves answered only by a quiver of her imprisoned hand. Then they had to speak the words that made them man and wife and one flesh.

As they knelt there was a sudden commotion in the hall without. The women shrank together, the men put their hands to their swords, but no one except a servant or two went out until the service was finished. Of the gentlemen it was Sir Richard's uncle who reached the hall first.

"What is it?" he asked angrily. "Now, what is all this?"

"Master Hopkins," said the serving man respectfully.

"What's the matter with him?" the old gentlemen asked.

"He came to the chapel door laughing like a madman," said old John, "but I would not let him enter—no, though Master Richard told me he was our guest. Then he said the pain was on him, and he fell to the floor as though he were being crushed in a vise—like that he fell all crushed. So we carried him to the chamber, your old chamber, where Moll Hopkins used to come o' nights—long ago, that is —and now he lies there."

The old servant's eyes were on his master's face; the look was intent, reproachful, but not unkind.

"Come and see him now," he said; "come and see him now."

The old gentleman pushed him aside and went first. A couple of louts kept guard at the door, but old John dismissed them with a gesture. Hopkins sat on a leather-covered

chair near the door. He was bent double and groaning. In spite of his pain he looked up at the old gentleman and said with a sneering laugh:

"You, father! You see that blood will tell. I've come to you at last."

Then he shrieked aloud; finally words came: "Let me alone! Who are you to torture me? 'Twas God's word that no witch shall live. And I had my lord protector's warrant. O God!" he cried again and again, screaming.

He looked like a man who is being pulled, stretched and molded on the rack. The old gentleman looked at this pain-torn figure crouching in the leathern chair, with the awful fear that perhaps after all this was his own son. He remembered the old days—Moll Hopkins and her red cheeks and her rousing kisses; always, too, the old serving man stood there like a reproaching conscience.

"Water! water!" cried Hopkins. Of a sudden he leaped to his feet and stood bolt upright, waving his hands. "Water!"

Even at that moment the bells began to

ring; cheerily the wedding bells, tugged at by four lusty lads, pealed out over Bolton village and the dale. The air rippled and sang with the music of the bells. The noise of the bells smote into the little chamber. The little chamber was filled with the clamor of the wedding bells. And Hopkins, staggering, went to the stone floor—dead like the broken shards and dust of clay that had been baked in the fire.

And an old man in that chamber got to his knees—and what he said belongs to God.

Always the bells rang, ringing in that wedding morning, ringing for the lover and his Lady Greensleeves. These two stood upon the terrace that looks northward over the dale.

"See, that is good fortune," she said, showing him a golden cloud that floated overhead; "that is our good fortune."

He kissed her and whispered a line of the song he had made for her, and the words were:

"For oh, Greensleeves is all my joy!
And oh, Greensleeves is my delight!
And oh, Greensleeves is my heart of gold!
And who but my Lady Greensleeves!"

So they looked at each other and their eyes promised many things, and they were happy.

They did not see the little train of low-wheeled carts, dragged wearily by lean ponies, that crossed the dale and breasted the hill. Why should they have seen or cared? It was a dreary little caravan. There were dark-colored men dressed in gaudy rags, women stooping under the weight of babies, creaking carts, unfed dogs—a caravan of homeless misery. In the second cart lay the queen of all this wretchedness. She might have been beautiful, so strange she was with her tawny skin and her reddish hair; perhaps she was beautiful as she lay there in the straw, moaning:

"Not yet—not yet!"

There was a gleam of copper at her throat and waist; her red hair was loose and wanton about her.

"Not yet!" she whispered.

She sat up and pushed the hair away from her face. Her eyes were wistful and intent, but not sorrowful.

THE EMPEROR'S GIFT

VII

THE EMPEROR'S GIFT

I

In the year VIII of the Republic, toward the end of Fructidor—in the month of ripe fruit,—the enemies of the young Republic ringed her round like wolves. Prussians, Austrians, Swiss, Italians, Russians, prowled and yelped at her frontiers. Napoleon was in Syria.

But the nation lived.

The nation lived and the armies of the Republic marched. Across Picardy and the green Argonne and the hills of Lorraine toward Germany; toward south and east and west the nation poured an avalanche of men —beardless little conscripts, their uniforms ragged, their feet bleeding; grizzled veterans who had fought in the wars of Louis the Well-Beloved; sons and fathers.

They were no longer shopmen, 'prentices, clerks, laborers, lords or hinds; they were no longer brothers, husbands, sons; they were the nation, the Republic—France; and they were the soldiers of liberty.

Guerre aux tyrans! Vive la nation!

The armies of the Republic marched.

Shopmen, clerks, schoolboys, dreaming of glory, they marched; peasants, gentlemen, beggars, they marched—dreaming of the unknown, of fortune, of liberty, equality, fraternity.

Guerre aux tyrans! Vive la nation!

These were strange new cries in the Old World. Not well pleased, the kings and rulers of men heard them. England urged on the royalist revolts in the Vendée, in Brittany and in the seaboard parts of Normandy.

The *émigrés* flocked home to this civil war. In the wooded lowlands of the Manche, in Ille-et-Vilaine, in the upland forests of Mayenne, they lighted a fire that only blood could damp down—nameless, heroic blood. It was a savage, shifting warfare of ambuscades, murder

done in dark woodways, death sent from dusky hedges, pillage and rapine and the brother's blood on the sword of his brother—an evil warfare. Those who loved the royal wraith and swore by the saints killed, in the name of France, their brothers who loved the wraith of liberty and swore by the Goddess of Reason; being therefore a war of hollow-tinkling phrases, it was savage above all others.

It was the twentieth day of Fructidor, a hot September afternoon. In the narrow road that wound through the woods from St. Hilaire d'Harcourt toward St. James the heat lay like a blanket. No wind stirred the heavy air; not a leaf fluttered. A dozen red hussars in dirty white cloaks, their steel scabbards clanking against the copper-bound saddles, rode through the forest with what silence and care they could. At any moment they knew the enemy's fire might open on them from the underbrush. They were not used to this warfare. There seemed nothing glorious in it—to be picked off from behind a tree was not a sol-

dier's death; and they who would have died blithely in the shock and tumult of open battle feared the dusky woods.

"My orders are to reach St. James by nightfall," said Sergeant Jean Marie Lorin, turning in his saddle.

He was a tall young man with gray eyes and the yellow hair of the Gaul; handsome, too, in his brutal health and insolent youth. "We must get on. We may find water."

The horses were fagged; the hussars drooped in their saddles—they had fasted since dawn and were throttled with thirst. Still at the sergeant's words the little troop pressed forward at a trot and breasted the hill. From the crest, where the forest fell away to right and left, they saw Montjoie, the huddled village and the old *château.*

"It seems quiet enough here," said Sergeant Lorin after a quick inspection. "The lieutenant was right—every hobnailed traitor in the district is off to Fougères. *Au trot!*"

The hussars straightened themselves in their saddles and lifted the jaded horses into a hob-

bling trot. They grinned at each other: "You'll drink with me, *hé,* Marius? Water! *Vive la nation!*"

Shouting with parched lips they rode into the village. The huts were deserted. They found neither food nor drink. In the village well a dead beast lay, swollen and monstrous, breeding pestilence.

"They have poisoned the water," said Sergeant Lorin thickly. A fierce rage took him—a desire to kill. "To the *château*!" he cried.

Thirst gripped him so at the throat he could hardly get out the words. His men answered with shouts and hoarse curses. They rushed their stumbling horses up to the castle. The gates of wood and iron were fast. Lorin battered with his saber and called. Within there was only silence. A half dozen hussars threw themselves against the gates until the rusty hinges gave way. With yells of triumph they stormed the courtyard. It was quite empty. Sergeant Lorin stared about him, at the empty stables and the blind *façade* of the *château,* at the moss-grown pavement under foot. All

was rotting, desolate, ignoble; yet it had the pathetic dignity of death. Jean Lorin remembered an old woman whom he had seen lying dead by the roadside during the Italian campaign. It was after the taking of Mantua. She lay in the ditch, crumpled among the dusty leaves; old, ignoble, dead—like this.

The horses had found the water; it was a spring that came up behind the north wall of the carriage house. The horses drank; then the men, trusting their beasts' instinct, dipped their faces in the warmish water and drank. Water—it was not water they sucked up; it was life and it was courage and it was youth.

"*Hé!* sergeant!"

Jean Lorin heard quite well. He heard the splashing in the water, the deep breathing of the horses, the cries and laughter of his men. His own mare tugged at the bit and threw herself forward, and then looked round at him with pain and reproach in her dark eyes. He sneered and pulled her back, gave her the spur and jerked her back again. He began to find a pleasure in the thirst that tortured him, his

parched mouth and strangled throat, his burning lungs and drifting brain. Men feel that pleasure on the desert sands—and die. His belly was pinched for want of food; it burned in him with acid fire; men die of it.

"O gué, ma mie"—

He remembered a love song of Cahors; it was a thing he remembered. Perhaps it is difficult to explain what was in Jean Lorin's mind as he dropped from his mare and struck her on the flank, saying, "Go, drink." He stood for a little while looking at the circled walls, at the blind *château,* at the red in the evening sky, and thought of none of these things. A dim sense that he was stronger than other men came to him. He had fought with Napoleon in Italy. This dark, little oily man had been made a general, but he, Jean Lorin—what might he not be! Life ran past his eyes; it was a panorama of conquest and glory and exultant personality. There was force in him; he felt it—aye, with his own hand.

"Sergeant!"

One of his men came up to him. This was Marius of Arles in Provence, a joyous little man.

"Drink, sergeant—*à la France!*" said he, holding up a bottle, the neck of which had been knocked off.

Jean Lorin found he could get no words from his parched mouth. He drank. The splintered bottle cut his lips and the wine and the blood ran down his throat together.

"Oh! oh!" he said, breathing deep; and drank again.

"There's a cellar of it," said Marius. *"Vive la guerre!* Drink, sergeant!"

Jean Lorin drank. The wine seemed good as water to him. The fog lifted from his brain.

"No one in the *château?*"

"No one, sergeant."

"Have you found food?"

"We've found the wine cellar, sergeant."

"Break down that door, Marius—you're a thick-shouldered man. So, both together. Down with it!"

The door was a small one; probably it had been a servant's entrance; it yielded to their weight and finally fell.

"See to the horses, Marius. See to my mare."

"You can trust man and horse, sergeant."

"All of you—I know," said Jean Lorin. "We must start in a few minutes. I'll look through this hive where the aristocrats used to swarm."

"Drink, sergeant."

Jean Lorin set the jagged neck to his lips and drank; then he threw the bottle into the dim place before him; it fell with a crash and splintered on the stone. There was very little light and he went forward cautiously. He drew his saber and with a sense of comfort felt the sweaty leathern hilt fit into his fist. First there was a stone staircase. He counted the steps in a dull way; there were nine. Another door, but it gave way as he touched it; then a long chamber, with many shrouded windows and pieces of furniture bulking dimly. Beyond was another room. Indeed, the rooms in

that half light seemed to fade away into an endless vista. He went straight ahead of him, his saber-hand a bit advanced. There was a curious singing in his head—a voice like that of whispering trees—but withal he felt life throb in him tense and strong. He went forward swiftly, and thinking of General Buonaparte (for his mind went back to Mantua), he thought of him as a rival in glory—glory.

His spurs clattered and sang, so proudly he walked.

Aye, while the rival was in Syria he would win fame and power at home. He would be lieutenant, captain, major, colonel.

He had entered, thrusting open the twin doors of a little circular room that seemed to be the segment of a tower. Even as he entered there came a scream that was thin and angry as the squeak of a trapped mouse, and something came toward him in the twilight. His saber was quicker than his will, and the thing, cut half through, shuddered down on the floor. He bent over it, curious, but not afraid. As

his eyes adjusted themselves to the light in the room, he saw that what he had struck down was an old woman. A droll, huddled thing she was. Once or perhaps twice she beat her hands on the floor; then death took her and she lay very still—crumpled, old, ignoble, dead. He had seen a thing like that in a ditch by Mantua.

"Bah!" he said, straightening up.

The blood was running from his cut lips; the taste of it was salt in his mouth. Mechanically he ran his fingers down the saber blade, cleansing it of blood and snapping the drops off in the air.

"Bah!" he said again.

He would have slid his saber into the steel scabbard had he not heard a little dull noise as of a leathern door swinging back; and then there was a light.

It was the flickering light of a candle held high. By the small flame Sergeant Lorin saw a slim girl, all in white. He had one glimpse of the life in her eyes, and that was all, for

with a little cry, "Oh! oh!" she let the candle fall and ran with arms outstretched toward the crumpled, quiet thing on the floor.

"Nurse! nurse! speak to me," she cried, falling on the dead woman. "Nurse! nurse! nurse!" and the girl repeated the word until it became a mere rippling noise, as though sobs and prayers and gasps for breath were all one sound. She sobbed there in the dark room of the tower.

"Get up!" The voice was thick and hurried.

Now, the man who spoke these two words was big and young and yellow-haired. He was Jean Marie Lorin, born in 1778 at Cahors, sergeant of the Twenty-third Hussars, son of the Republic, and he looked upon General Buonaparte as his rival. His hand left a stain of blood on the white silk stuff that covered the girl's shoulder, his lips a stain of blood where he crushed them against her mouth; drunk with wine and murder and lust, he took her in his arms, laughing—she was the aristocrat; *guerre aux tyrans;* laughing—

The soldiers of the Republic—none save they carried the torch of liberty into all lands and made kings quake on their rotten thrones—the soldiers of the Republic drank off their wine while they splashed with water the legs and bellies of their horses in the courtyard of Montjoie.

"Where's the sergeant?"

"Drink to him!" cried Marius by way of answer. He was hung about the belt with bottles of old wine. One he carried flushed to his lips.

A trooper who had been washing out his horse's ears wiped his wet hands on the red of his breeches and took the bottle from Marius.

"I'll drink," he said to the sergeant, and gurgled down a pint of good wine.

"Drink, Chopin," said Marius, grinning. "You are a Brittany rogue yourself. Drink."

Chopin, who was a lean, yellow man, with hazy, cryptic eyes and a bearded face, handed the bottle back to his comrade. Then he drew his wet fingers over his eyes and said softly:

"I did not drink to the sergeant, though he's a good man. I drink damnation to the Comte

de Nemorin and all his race! I know Montjoie. Eleven years I lived in his hand. The old count had a gallows back of the stables there, but he did not hang me—no."

"Drink, comrade," said Marius.

Chopin drank.

"He's in London now, the old count, eating Pitt's gold," said Chopin, "but some day I'll find him. Listen, Marius. It was my sister. She was only a little girl, no older than his own daughter. Marius, I swear by St. Anne that if ever vengeance—"

Sergeant Lorin stood in the little doorway. He was white and stern.

"Where's my mare?" he asked.

His emphasis was dull and dangerous.

Marius brought up the sergeant's horse, cleaned of sweat now and drinking in the air through her wet, porous hide. She turned her kind eyes on her master and shrugged up the skin on her back and fore quarters, which is the horse's way of saying, "I'm in fine fettle."

"A cheval! A cheval!"

The twelve hussars, busied with their horses

or their wine, started into immediate form, so harsh and meaning the voice was. They swung themselves into the saddles and ranged their horses. Sergeant Lorin looked at them. 'Twas an ill-dressed troop, for wine bottles dangled at their belts. He smiled grimly as he threw himself across his mare's saddle.

"Forward!" he said, giving his mare a twitch of the bridle reins. "We must be at St. James before nightfall—lieutenant's orders."

The little cavalcade swept through the castle gates and took the hill road toward St. James. The moon made a little light in the sky, and behind them the village of Montjoie smoldered, red and smoky.

"Sergeant," said Chopin, riding up behind Jean Lorin—he was thick-bearded, bony, yellow-faced—and touching awkwardly his cap, "there was no one in the *château?*"

"No one," said Sergeant Lorin. "Fall back! Ranks—forward!" he added sharply, "forward! It is only a league to St. James, and the road is good. Now, forward!"

With one single rhythm, and the same, the hoof beats rang on the road.

So they swept into the little town of St. James.

Sergeant Lorin, having fulfilled his mission, reported.

II

Au Monsieur Le Comte Lorin de Cahors, Colonel au 23E Regiment de Dragoons.

This day, the tenth of Fructidor, in the year one of the French Empire.

Monsieur:

I beg to inform you that the Emperor has relieved you of your functions and duties as Colonel of his Twenty-third Regiment of Dragoons and that your name will be stricken from the army list. You will retire to whatsoever place you may choose for a retreat, but on acknowledging the receipt of this letter you will kindly notify the War Office of your residence. I salute you.

(Signed) BERTHIER.

By Leduc, Sergeant-major.

Not a pleasant letter to read. Jean Marie Lorin, Colonel of the Twenty-third Dragoons, Count of the Empire, read it as he sat in a little *café* facing the house of Molière. At first

he did not understand it. He had fought well in Germany and Austria; he had brought home wounds and glory. A big blond man, broad-shouldered and handsome, he lolled over the little wooden table of the Café Procopé drinking his chocolate. His thoughts harked back over his career in life. Simple enough, all this: born in Cahors, a trooper in the Twenty-third, and then a sergeant; made a lieutenant for deeds of valor in the wars against the Chouans of Brittany; then a captain, a colonel—grades won on Rhenish battlefields. Now it was all over and done with.

"Why? why? why?" said the young soldier, beating his fist on the table—"why?"

Jealousy, envy. The rival hated him and feared him—this black little Corsican who had made himself Emperor of France; so the rival had turned him out of the army. And yet Buonaparte knew his worth—had made him Colonel of the Twenty-third and a Count of the new Empire. Now, with a mere scrawled letter from Berthier, this new Emperor broke

his career and sent him back to the poverty of Cahors.

"I'll see him," he said to himself, "and I'll find out what the Corsican Emperor means by this."

He set out briskly. From the Café Procopé to the Tuileries was merely a moment's walk. He entered the garden. First the grenadiers; then a long double line of Mamelukes in their gaudy uniforms; last the infantrymen in blue and white, black-gaitered to the knee. The Colonel, Count Lorin de Cahors, passed swiftly, giving the salute of his rank. He met men he knew—gorgeous officers of the Hussars in white capes set off with astrakhan; broidered cuirassiers in scarlet dolmans. They did not answer his salute. Officers in gray, in blue, in red, in white turned their backs on him as he passed. They were men he knew, and Colonel Lorin de Cahors set his teeth and a nasty sneer cut his face. He went on and thrust himself into a little group of men of his own rank and higher rank. There were civilians there in

broidered coats; on the outskirts a hovering flock of women.

Into this company there came a little man, short, rather fat, very nervous; he went swiftly to the group of generals and colonels. He was short-necked, this man, and the stiff collar of his coat cut into his fat cheeks. His chin was blue from over-shaving and there was a deep dimple in it. His nose was white and thin. His lips were pinched and mocking. A glum, fat little man—but there was fire in his eyes as he glanced left and right at the people. He muttered to himself, as men do who have the habit of talking in their sleep. His hands behind his back, he sauntered up toward Murat, speaking words of this sort:

"The conscripts must be trained. I have raised sixty thousand men. They must be trained at once. And gloves—you must see to the gloves—for my troopers. They must have gloves."

His hands behind his back, the thick, dark little man turned away. Always he talked:

"You forget the small things—all of you forget. Boots and gloves—that is war. I don't like it. My men must have boots. I have given orders. See that it doesn't happen again."

Usually this man went with bent head and eyes toward the ground. Suddenly he lifted his face and stared at his big cavalrymen and saw the Count Lorin de Cahors among them. A queer smile went across his face. Still talking, he paced to and fro:

"You are too fond of money, all of you. You, Murat, you took the pictures and carriages out of Milan. Lannes loves money, and Augereau loves money, and Berthier—you all love money. But have a care. I'll put a stop to all that. Every one is stealing. I'll put a stop to that."

The little man went to and fro, his hands behind his back. His eyes read men's hearts and minds. Humble and silent the generals who had won historic battles looked at him with the mien of little dogs.

"You are thieves, all of you—all of you,"

said Napoleon, "and I will have probity. You, Lannes—you, Berthier—you, Murat—I will make you honest. What do the English newspapers say? You are rogues, all of you. I will have honest men about me. You, Murat," and perhaps a memory of old days came to him, for he pinched the curly-headed giant's ear and smiled at him, "you are the worst of all."

He turned his back on Murat and paced the circle, staring at the boots of his officers, angry, grumbling, impatient as a bear. Suddenly he lifted his meaningful eyes on Colonel Lorin de Cahors.

"You?" said the emperor. "What are you doing here?"

"Sire—"

"Sire," repeated Napoleon with a grim little laugh—"Sire! Well, how come you here?"

The colonel advanced and saluted.

"Are you married?"

"No, sire."

"Good," said Napoleon, and he went round the circle of his officers and he said dully:

"You are thieves—you, too, Colonel de Cahors," he added sharply. "I mean you. But you shall pay for it, all of you. There is too much politics. I will not have it. You hear? Not married, eh?" said Napoleon, looking at Colonel Lorin de Cahors. "You have money?"

"I am a Colonel in the Twenty-third and a Count of the Empire," said Lorin. He threw up his head and stared boldly at the rival.

"Are you?" said Napoleon sharply. He turned on his heel and cried shrilly:

"Talleyrand—you!"

From among the courtiers there came forward a fat old man limping on one foot, dressed in a snuff-colored coat and wearing a big powdered wig. Approaching the emperor he laughed with easeful and rosy good nature.

"Is that the man, Talleyrand?" Napoleon asked.

Talleyrand looked at Colonel Lorin de Cahors and said oilily:

"That is the man."

Napoleon, little, swift and dark, strode up to Colonel Lorin, tapped him on the chest and stared in his face.

"I will not have it," he said. "You disgrace me. What story is this I hear of you? It is in the English newspapers. I will crush you as girls crush flowers in their hands. Talleyrand!"

"Where is the woman?" he asked abruptly.

"Here, sire. One moment," said Talleyrand.

He bowed, passed the line of generals and the thin fringe of civilians and gave his arm to a woman who stood with others on the outskirts of the crowd. Then he came again, the woman on his arm, toward Napoleon. The Emperor was walking to and fro, his eyes on the ground. Colonel Lorin looked at all the actors in this little drama—at Napoleon, at Talleyrand, at the woman. What it all meant he knew not, but like a brave man he straightened his spine and squared his shoulders.

As the woman came forward Napoleon faced her in a sharp military way.

"La Comtesse de Nemorin," he said quickly, "you are she—and this is the man?"

The woman made the gesture which means yes. She was young, almost a girl. The red in her hair and the gray pain in her eyes made her sad and beautiful. The dress she wore added to her beauty; for in the first year of the Empire ladies dressed themselves in the sentimental gowns of Greece. So from head to foot she was robed in white and yellow stuffs of thin silk. She was girdled high up under her breasts with a girdle of yellow ribbon. A handsome, lithe, long-limbed girl she was, with hair gloriously red, but her white face was pinched and sad.

"This is the man?" asked Napoleon grimly.

"Yes," said the woman.

Talleyrand said yes and took snuff.

"Monsieur le Comte de Cahors," said Napoleon, the emperor in a queer, soft voice, "this is your wife, Mademoiselle de Nemorin of Montjoie in Brittany—your wife, you understand, or you are no longer the colonel of the

Twenty-third. See to it Talleyrand—see it is done."

The emperor turned to his generals. His hands behind his back, he stared at them gloomily.

"Rogues, all of you, but I'll put a stop to it," he said, and again he went to Murat and pulled the hairy giant's ear and slapped his fat cheeks. "You are the worst rogue of all. You waste women, and women must be respected. I'll not have it."

The dark little man fumbled in his brain to find what he should say next. The words that came were:

"Where's Talleyrand?"

He paced to and fro, his head drooping. A servant, or perhaps a general, ran to bid Talleyrand come. But Talleyrand did not come. At that moment he was busy in the chapel, listening to the words which should make Colonel Jean Marie Lorin, the Comte de Cahors, the husband of Mademoiselle Marguerite de Nemorin of Montjoie in Brittany.

With an easy gesture of farewell the Emperor sauntered toward the palace.

III

THE coach drawn by six gray horses rumbled heavily along the forest road. Colonel Lorin, who from the heat of the day and the sullenness of his anger had dozed a little, roused himself and looked out. He admired the easy address of the postilion who guided the leaders and the sure hand of the coachman who held the reins over the Quadriga. The creaking coach took the hill slowly, the iron work jangling, the coachman's whip cracking out innumerable pistol shots to right and left of the tugging grays, the postilion whistling to the leaders. At the top of the hill the road opened in the forest. Below lay a broad prospect of wood and vale, the ruins of a village and above it a darkling castle. As he looked out upon this landscape other days and years came back dimly to Colonel Lorin. He was quite sure he had ridden this road before, but when?

He turned and looked at the slim mute

figure in the dusky corner of the carriage. He saw only the white of her cloak, the profile of a brooding face shaded by a flaring hood.

"Madame la Comtesse," he said, "this ride might have tired a husband's patience, but this day of all days I owe you obedience. Still, may I ask whether we are near our journey's end?"

The lady made no motion, save that her hands fretted the folds of her cloak.

"Madame," he continued with formal courtesy, "the emperor has given me a gift above my deserts. He has given me a wife from the old nobility of France—of Brittany, is it not? —and I, as you know, in spite of my new title, am but a rough soldier. I do not know why the emperor should have done me this honor. Do you, madame?"

The lady, her chin in her hand, brooded in the dusky corner of the carriage, as she had done for many hours.

"Nor do I understand why Monsieur Talleyrand—that great man—should have my happiness so much at heart," Colonel Lorin added.

"But I am a soldier. I obey orders. Madame, you and the emperor and Monsieur Talleyrand have conspired to make me happy. A wife above my deserts. Permit me once more to thank you—all of you."

It may be that the nagging irony in his words stung the lady out of her resolute silence.

"You need not thank me yet," she said coldly.

The coach was lurching swiftly down the hill, but Colonel Lorin thrust his head from the window and bade the postilion make haste. The fellow turned in his saddle and looked back—a yellow, lean man with a bearded face and hazy eyes. He touched his glazed hat and gave the leaders the whip.

"I've seen that fellow, but where—where," Colonel Lorin muttered. He sank back in his corner, silent. The present he did not understand; vaguely he felt that he was the victim of the past—a past that was not his own.

The squealing grays scrambled through the ashen ruins of a village, mounted a short hill to

the castle and pulled up with a jerk. The postilion dropped from his saddle and opened the door of the carriage and let down the steps. As the door opened on her side the lady stepped out first; without a glance behind her she entered the courtyard of the *château.* There were a dozen men or more about the gateway. They were thick-shouldered men, dark and bearded, dressed in rough garments and wearing heavy clogs. As he leaped from the carriage Colonel Lorin scanned them with the habit of his profession. The postilion approached with a military salute.

"Chopin, one of your hussars when you were sergeant of the Twenty-third, here in the old Chouans days," said the fellow; "years ago, my colonel."

"I do not remember all my men," the colonel said brusquely, pushing him aside and entering the courtyard, "and just now—"

"But I do remember," Chopin said, though he said it to the colonel's back, "and if I had not remembered—well, 'tis not in my hands now.

Tout se paye! The old count learned that in London, and the colonel will learn as much here."

The coach waited in the road; the peasants about the gate slipped one by one into the courtyard; the gates were closed.

Colonel Lorin crossed the courtyard straight to the white-cloaked figure standing near a door of the old *château*—a desolate old castle, the blind windows stained red now with the evening light. He may have heard the gates close behind him; certainly he swept his eyes round the moldy courtyard and along the front of the naked stables; but with a soldier's steady stride he went straight to the lady, who had paused near the small open door of the *château*. He gave no sign that he knew that door, though his heart jerked and pounded in his breast. He saluted and stood waiting. The lady entered the narrow passage and he followed. They climbed a stone staircase. There were nine steps; then there were doors and long dusky chambers opening one into the other. An odor of decay; dust started up from

the old floors and dripped from the rotting tapestries.

Jean Marie Lorin followed the lady the emperor had given him for wife until they came to a small room in the tower. It was a circular room, shuttered and dark. For a moment they stood there silent, both. Suddenly the man ran to the window and with a thrust of his shoulder splintered the wooden shudders and the dingy glass. The sunlight streamed in; the red evening light made a path to the lady's feet and shone upon her face and hair. With a little gesture she threw back her hood and faced the man who was her husband. Her face and eyes were quiet and firm as stone and very cold.

"It is here your wife should receive you," she said.

Jean Lorin had known; and yet a man may know a thing and not permit himself to know it. But now a great pain blinded him—a swift anguish struck at his brain. It seemed that his throat was knotted with thirst, while on his lips was the acrid taste of wine and the savor of

blood. He seemed to be living once more a black hour of the past, an hour of war—a heat-clogged road, thirst, a blazing village, an old *château,* this room, this woman. With haggard eyes he looked up at the lady who was his wife.

"Madame la Comtesse," he said hoarsely, "I—"

He found no other words. The lady waited, slim and beautiful, and cold as the fate that comes up out of the past to judge and condemn; and in her eyes scorn darkened slowly as she looked at the wavering man by the window. Then she spoke.

"It is here, sir, I should receive you, yes, now you are my husband," and the scorn smoldered like fire in her steady eyes, "and all my task is done. All done," she added gloomily, glancing at the decayed walls and ruin about her. "My father is dead, my race is dead, the France I love is dead, and I have no place in this new world. All done!"

So slight and pale a girl she was, and yet she stood there calm and proud, as though incarn-

ating the splendor and beauty of the ancestral past upon which she looked back, the glories of the lords and ladies who had laughed and loved once in Montjoie.

Doubtless for an instant this haggard man in the window, this soldier of the Republic, was very far away from her thoughts, but his thoughts were all on her. Or were they thoughts? Was it not rather that every fiber in him throbbed toward her as sound throbs out from a plucked harp-string? The brain in him was the source of innumerable waves that went to her one after the other—billows of impulse—the very well-springs of his life going out to her in wave after wave. Why? But how should he know why? These things happen to a man as he goes through life. You ride down a street and see a girl's face in a window. When you have ridden on an hour's journey something cries aloud in the soul of you: "That was she!" and you spur back and come again to the house—and there is no face at the window. And evermore you go through life, heedless and aloof, brooding.

Now, Jean Marie Lorin riding down through the years—and through how many gray years he and you and I must ride none can say—turned back, and, lo! the girl's face was in the window.

"Madame," he said, "my wife—Marguerite!"

He was quite calm now. It was enough that he had seen her again, that in this woman he had met her once again in the years that he knew her; nothing else mattered.

Hearing these words, the lady drew back with a startled look on her face, as though she had heard a voice at once new and dimly familiar.

"My wife—Marguerite," he repeated gently, but he did not approach her, "you have misjudged me and you are right. I have condemned myself. That, too, is right. I do not mean that my life will pay my debt. Perhaps it will—perhaps it is all folly, the debt and the life."

The lady took a step toward him, then paused.

"Comedy now?" she asked coldly.

"If life is a comedy," he answered gently, "I do not know. There can be no heroism in throwing one life away when we have so many —when it is all an endless coming and going. You know, Marguerite, this is not the first time we have met."

She stared at him.

"Nor the second nor the third time we have met. No," he added softly, "nor will it be the last time."

Always he stood by the window. She joined him there and coldly she pointed down into the courtyard.

"Look," she said, "and judge whether it be the last time. Those men are mine, all faithful to me, the only faithful ones left. That man yonder is Chopin. He does not hate you but he hates your crime. It is for the last time; that is why they are here. Now, sir, you understand."

"I understood long ago," said Jean Lorin quietly. He took the traveling pistols from his belt and dropped them from the window.

They clattered down on the flags of the courtyard. "But for the last time? Perhaps you mean for the last time in this life? Then you are right, Marguerite. But in the other years I shall come to you as I did in the past." He drew his hand over his eyes and threw back his head impatiently. "Do you remember? You must remember, Marguerite"—the girl's face was frightened, but she looked at him with searching, helpful eyes—"when I first loved you—when we loved each other together in the dark world and then again and again. I have always loved you. Why, you are the woman!" he cried wonderingly, and took her hands and stared into her eyes with amazed certainty. "You are she! Don't you remember?"

The lady shivered a little when he touched her and went back from him, crying "Oh! oh!" and a hunted look came into her face as she glanced about the room. Jean Lorin knelt swiftly and kissed the rim of her white gown; then he rose and spread his big arms with a gesture of helplessness. He drew himself up

and laughed falsely, as one who gets himself together.

"Madame la Comtesse, there must be ghosts in your old castle and they have got into my brain. Forgive me," he said with a strained attempt at courtesy. "Will you permit me to take my leave? I know my way to the court-yard."

He bowed and went to the door. There he turned and looked at her with quiet and not hopeless eyes, and his voice as he spoke a few words was quite his own.

What he said was, "Good-by, dear one, good-by!"

She heard his steady footsteps in the dusky rooms beyond. She swayed a little on her feet and put her hands up to her temples. Her thought was—but no, neither you nor I know her thought. Something ached in her; there was a fluttering storm in her heart and in her brain, and her mouth was parched and there was a salt taste on her lips. So for a moment she swayed there in the fading sunlight.

A TENEMENT OF BLACK FUMES

VIII

A TENEMENT OF BLACK FUMES

I

He could not remember a time when he had not loved her. He had watched her grow from babyhood into childhood. She was still a child, only fourteen when they were married. He was only a little further on toward manhood at that time—this slim, dark lad of twenty-two. Even then, however, he had written imperishable poems and had eaten of the fruit of the tree of good and evil. He was as one who walked upon the edge of life. The ebb and flow of daily events did not interest him, for beyond them he saw mysterious depths, haunted with shadows of the long ago and the far-away—vague phantoms of beauty and horror. He led his child-wife with him into this dark country, where the thing that is seems only the shadow of what may be.

They wandered there together. Hand in hand they went through the Valley of Many Colored Grass where the ruby-red asphodels grow. They entered the desolate domain of silence, where there was no shadow of sound; and another time they found themselves in an ebony chamber and a corpse-like thing stood there, and this was Death. Once having crossed this borderland of mystery, which lies at the rim of human life, they came upon a gray house by a black and lurid tarn; there they dwelt for many days and their guest-fellow was Fear.

Many and adventurous were their journeyings; strange shapes grew out of the twilight and questioned them; bodiless voices went shrieking past them; it was very terrible, and the child-wife clung close to him—very close.

Now and then they would hear music, so sad and sweet—intolerably sad—that they would weep together. Then hand in hand they would grope their way back to the borderland and come out again into daily life. At these times the man was haggard and his wild eyes

were dark with unspeakable thought; but the girl-wife would lift to him a face serene and quiet as a flower. So long they went hand in hand she cared not though they journeyed with chimæra. Always her eyes were confident and true, but in the years her face grew very white and thin and the girlishness fell away from her.

Not many years went by. Five of them passed, and she had grown so feeble bodily that she could scarcely walk the length of the naked little house wherein they hid themselves; then there were five more years, when she lay upon the bed—the blue veins hardly throbbing in her wasted temples, the little hands clay-cold and almost transparent, folded on her breast.

During these long years he went out into the world and fought as men must fight for a crust. He fought madly as one who uproots an oak that he may gather a few acorns and bear them home. When he passed in the street—this haggard creature with the wild, dark eyes—respectable men, householders,

well-doers, self-respecting poets, shrugged their shoulders and said: "He is mad!"

Others threw stones at him or spat slyly at him as he went by. He, perhaps, would turn upon them with curses that blistered them like flame; or unheeding, would go his way—following a beckoning hand they could not see—home to the naked little house and the woman who had been dying so long and who lived only because they willed she should live. And she would put her cold hand on his forehead and whisper her love. Then the gloom would fade from his eyes. The mask he wore to front the world with would drop from his face.

He would read to her from an old book of visionary and forgotten lore, until some sudden phrase would leap out, compelling and alive—a mystic phrase that would open the gates of ivory or basalt, and they would go out through the gate into the misty mid-region which floats between this life and the next.

Always paler; the blue veins in the temples beating more faintly, the woman struggled

back into the daily world. Death came very near to her many times; again—again, and yet again—death stooped to take her, but the man, kneeling at her bedside, folded her in his love and held her safe.

Ten years; they were more than man and woman, more than man and wife; they had journeyed so often across the borderland—so many times they had gone down into the valley where the shadows crowd each other—together they had entered so often the ebony chamber, that neither knew where self began and love ended.

One night he was brooding by her bedside; for a moment his thoughts had gone out into the streets and lanes—the roaring workshops of life. She was lying very quiet, the wan hands folded, the big melancholy eyes half shut. Even at that moment a wind blew out of a cloud and chilled her, and that was death; but what of her could not die went otherwhere, and highborn kinsmen who awaited her coming met her at the gates of the dim, new world and led her in.

In the little naked house the man was left alone. He looked at the pallid, shrunken thing on the bed and knew it was not she. He cried aloud and rushed out into the night.

In the black hollow of the night were wind and wintry rain and the sound of voices wailing.

II

WOMEN wore crinoline; gentlemen wore tight trousers, stocks and high-necked coats with gilt buttons; girl-babies were never short-coated but went gowned through life; stage-coaches ran from Bowling Green up to Corporal Thompson's "Madison Cottage;" Union Square was the site of a powder house and a potter's field; the first telegraph line carried fitful messages to Albany; elderly gentlemen still took snuff and told reminiscences of the war of 1812; shop-boys and pallid girls quoted Longfellow—in a word it was the year of our Lord 1849, in the good city of New York, William F. Havemeyer, mayor.

It was a warm evening a few days before the Fourth of July.

Snug-waisted gentlemen strolled about the shady walks of City Hall Park. Those who had evil consciences looked askance at the Bridewell and the gaol. The æsthetically minded crossed the park toward John Vanderlyn's Rotunda—for this amiable little ingrate was then exploiting the artistic education Colonel Aaron Burr had given him in Paris and Rome; or sauntered southward to the old Park Theater, or risked themselves in the far wilds of Astor Place.

Down Broadway a bit and one street below the park there was a broad, dingy basement, with sanded floor and wooden chairs and tables. It reeked with tobacco smoke. It smelled of stale beer and faded alcoholic drinks. The oil lamps flickered there over a narrow bar, in front of which stood a stout, rosy, gouty, slippered old German in a greasy coat and bulging shoes—a puffy old man, who wore gaudy rings and a thick watch-chain.

Through the smoke he surveyed his clients.

At one table—to the right as you came down the stairs—three men were seated, drinking whiskey and water. One of them was a well-looking heavy-jowled man of forty, with pleasant eyes and brown curling hair. He was "quite the gentleman" as the saying goes, which means just this: his manner was so gentlemanly that it was evidently acquired ten years later than it should have been. He raised a deprecatory hand, and, with a winning intellectual smile, said:

"No, Stoddard, no—really, I can't let you say that. You know Poe is my friend."

"Bah!" said Stoddard. That was not the word he used, but having made his exclamation he spat on the floor and sucked his pipe.

He was a big-shouldered man, youngish, bearded, with the hardy look of a peasant in his cold, harsh face. Having blown out a cloud of smoke he said:

"He's a damned villain. I'm a poet, too, you know it, Willis! Bayard Taylor knows it! I came from a blacksmith shop—well, what of it?"

"All the more credit, dear sir," said Mr. Willis with his gentlemanly air; "was not Gifford a cobbler and Master Keats an apothecary?"

"Well, I pay my debts, don't I?" asked the peasant-faced man, knocking his pipe against his knuckles, "and do I bring ruin upon innocent women? Do I? I tell you, Poe is a viper! Don't you argue with me! He's a viper. When the women run after a little black-visaged rogue like him, you can tell there's something wrong about him. Think of that poor woman up in New England—the one who writes verses—and his own wife—it's my opinion he killed her."

"Really, Mr. Stoddard, you are too emphatic," said the gentlemanly poet. "Now I think Poe may perhaps lack the real poetic fire, but as a man, as a gentleman," said Mr. Willis, taking up his glass of whiskey and water and sipping it prettily, "Poe is not to be criticized—though I admit that his manner is a trifle Southern. Still, he's a gentleman—good blood—good blood; he has it—the real

thing, the '*Je ne sais quoi*'—the 'I dinna ken' —the manner! As a writer, of course, well— I'm afraid he's not quite sane."

"Sane!" said Stoddard. "He's a damned drunken dog."

The third man at the table had not spoken, though he seemed to be listening with an amused air. He was a short fat fellow of sixty, with a big, massive head and matted gray hair falling over his neck and shoulders; wise, piercing eyes looked out from under his shaggy, gray brows. He threw back his big head, expanded his chest and roared: "Poets —poets! Stop barking at my friend, the poet!"

"My learned Dr. Francis," said Willis, "believe me—"

"Me learned Theban," shouted the doctor, slapping the table, "you are all the same. You all hate each other. Every male and female poet of ye! Here's you, Stoddard—because you write about stars and dead babies, you won't admit that Poe can write about dead women and the moon. And you, Willis, who

write everything from Shakespeare to Tom Moore—d'ye suppose because I know Asiatic cholera I'll not acknowledge that Dr. Hossak, God bless him! knows more than I do of yellow fever? You're children all of ye, you poets. Let Eddie Poe be! Men, men—but he's in deeper water than you know!"

The man who had been a blacksmith spat over his beard.

"That's what I think of him, Dr. Francis," he said. "Did you read what he wrote about my book? He's a drunken dog and a thief and a blasphemer, Poe is—and I shouldn't wonder if he was an atheist."

As Stoddard spoke there had come down the steps into the smoky room a slim, swift-footed man, dressed in black. His long coat was buttoned snugly about his slight figure. He wore a black stock doubled severely about his white shirt-collar. In his gloved right hand he carried a small walking-stick. There was nothing remarkable about this slight, youngish man save his face—it was pale and haggard and wonderful; wild black eyes looked out of it—

wonderful eyes that may have seen the mystery at which they who lie dead, wrapped in white linen bands, stare evermore. A haggard, unquiet face, framed in thick hair, soft and dark.

As he came down the staircase, Dr. Francis hailed him with a merry shout.

"Poe!" he roared. "Oh, it's Poe—come here, lad! You never came at a better moment. We're all sitting here blackening your character. Come here, man—I've just learned ye were no poet."

Talking nonsense of this sort Dr. Francis rose and took Poe by the hand; always those piercing old eyes of his scanned the young man's face—with a physician's rare insight and a friend's tenderness; his hand even clung to Poe's for a while as though he were sensing the tides of nerve and blood that beat there.

"Sit down," he said.

"Glad to see you, Willis," said Poe, shaking hands with the gentlemanly poet.

"My friend, Stoddard," said Willis, introducing the poet with the pipe.

"Ah," said Poe.

"I'm delighted to meet you, Mr. Poe," said the blacksmith poet, holding out a ready hand, "I've often heard of you—"

"And talked of me," said Poe, taking a chair next to Dr. Francis. "Yes, I heard you as I came in. But that sort of thing doesn't matter. How are you, Willis?"

"That play is killing me," said Willis, putting up a white hand to his heavy face. "It is terrible work!"

"You are right, Willis," Poe said sympathetically, "I read your last play—*Tortesa*—it *was* terrible work; why do you do it?"

"What will you drink, Edgar?" Dr. Francis asked casually.

"Nothing! I? Nothing!" Poe answered. "I'm going up to Boston to-night—a lecture for the frog-ponders. I wanted to bid you good-by, Doctor, for I thought I should find you here. Oh, pay for the drinks and come away," he added abruptly.

He stood up and shook hands with Willis.

"Wait, man, wait," cried the doctor. "I move leisurely—like a butterfly. You, deuce

take you! are as direct and brief in your flights as a bee."

"I'll stay," said Poe, with his sudden wonderful smile, "if Willis will let me recite those Broadway verses of his. Willis, you've never done anything so good, and you will never equal them no matter how long you live. That's true poetry, Willis!"

Leaning against the table, there in the smoky beer cellar—while the author looked up at him with a red, happy face—Poe chanted aloud, in his low-toned, silver voice, Willis' best poem:

The shadows lay along Broadway,
'Twas near the twilight tide,
And slowly there a lady fair
Was walking in her pride—
Alone walked she, yet viewlessly
Walked spirits at her side.

Peace charmed the street beneath her feet,
And honor charmed the air,
And all astir looked kind on her
And called her good as fair—
For all God ever gave to her
She kept with chary care.

She kept with care her beauties rare
From lovers warm and true,
For her heart was cold to all but gold,
And the rich came not to woo.
Ah, honored well are charms to sell
When priests the selling do!

Now, walking there was one more fair—
A slight girl, lily pale,
And she had unseen company
To make the spirit quail—
'Twixt want and scorn she walked forlorn,
And nothing could avail.

No mercy now can clear her brow
For this world's peace to pray—
For as love's wild prayer dissolved in air,
Her woman's heart gave way.
And the sin forgiven by Christ in Heaven
By man is cursed alway.

A moment's silence; it was broken by Stoddard blowing through his pipe-stem. Willis heaved himself out of his chair and laid his plump, white hand on Poe's shoulder; there were tears in his eyes; his voice choked a little as he said: "I did think it was a true thing—but the way you recited it makes it truer."

"It's poetry, Willis," was Poe's answer; "it

is quiet and true and real—but the end is bad. The identical rimes of 'way' and 'alway' are weak. Why don't you take the two closing lines and begin the last stanza with them. Your climax would be stronger. Are you ready, Doctor?"

Dr. Francis had paid the bill to the gouty German by the bar; he roared good night to the two poets and followed Poe up the stairs to the street. It was dark there, for the twilight had gone and there was no moon; a few lamps flickered here and there among the trees; the chief light came from the windows of taverns and shops. Arm in arm the two men went up Broadway.

Dr. Francis spoke first.

"Do you sleep better now?" he asked.

"Yes—I sleep," Poe replied.

They walked on in silence for a few moments, the doctor thrusting his boisterous shoulders to right and left, Poe stepping nervously.

"Turn here," said Poe abruptly, leading the way down a dark street toward the river;

"there are too many people in Broadway—I don't like people to rub against me."

Silence again for a little while; the doctor kept his hand locked on his friend's slender arm—he could feel the pulse of vein and nerve in it.

"It's a queer thing—sleep is a queer thing," Poe said softly. "You know, Doctor, before she died how I hungered and yearned and fought for sleep! Then it was darkness—the blank rest. Then I could sleep for a few hours and forget her poor wasted body—the blue veins in her temples—her terrified eyes. But now when I fall asleep I go through every waking hour that I lived with her. Can you explain that, Doctor? There must be a scientific reason. You know I am not a fool. But why is it, Doctor, I am alive now only when I am asleep? Then she and I walk and talk together—you know she was my cousin—as we did when we were children. Last night she came into my sleep just as when she was fourteen years of age. And just as we did a dozen years ago we went away quietly to-

gether through the sunny street to be married. Her eyes were just the same—sad and true, full of fear and trust. She repeated the same words: 'Edgar, we will never part!'

"Now I am afraid to sleep. But I live only when I dream. Here as I walk with you—Thursday when I lecture to them on poetry—the frog-pond people—I shall be an eternity away from myself. I tell you," cried the younger man, throwing up his arms with a mad gesture, "that I live only in my dreams—and that is hell! It is hell, Dr. Francis," he added.

"Don't walk so fast, Ed," said the doctor. "I'm not so young as I was in 1812. Honestly since you ask me, I think you've been brooding too much. You should not have stayed in Fordham after your wife died. You should have looked up your friends—"

"Friends," said Poe. "Griswold and Willis and Graham and—"

"And me," said Dr. Francis bluntly.

"Yes, I should have come to you," Poe answered gently, "but oh, John, I could not talk

to you. I wanted to lie down in the dark and think."

"A bad thing, Ed."

"Is it? That was what I said to myself. I tried not to sleep. I wrote, wrote, wrote—so I might not sleep and find her in my dreams. I bent all my mind to the work and I wrote 'Eureka'; and I made science my handmaid and she and I went out together in the universe to find God; and we did not find God, but we found the absolute, unconditional force that creates—the Eternal Power. And when I had finished I knew that the last word had been said, that I had proved all, that I had found the truth which cannot die."

He paused a second and added slowly: "Or if by any means it be now trodden down so that it die, it will rise again to life everlasting."

"What science says is the only truth," said Dr. Francis in his thick, honest voice, "and if science was your handmaid—"

Poe turned his wild eyes on his friend; then he laughed aloud in the night.

"She who died wrote it, not I," he cried

madly. "She—not I! She was my handmaiden—not science, but she! When the work was done I said to myself: 'Now here is a year's work and it is finished; and she has been dead for a year and that is finished.' And so, John, I lay down to sleep. Then she came. I saw her awful eyes, and I knew that I had written only what she knew; only that, John Francis. She knew, and I was the scribe who wrote. I think she is only in Fordham, John. As a scientific man, isn't that what you think? Or in Maryland—she might be there, because you know that was where we lived when she was a little girl."

Poe's voice had sunk to a whisper; his slim body shook as he leaned against the doctor's shoulder. Doctor Francis spoke now and then —a mere commonplace word:

"Look out for the crossing, Ed—there's a step here," or "all this comes from too much solitude."

Poe said: "The only thing I am afraid of is that my dreams will come to me when I am

awake. That would be hell—it would be a torment worse than hell."

"Look here, Poe," said Doctor Francis, in his matter-of-fact way—but always he studied his friend with observing, quiet eyes. "When does that Boston lecture take place? Thursday? And you take the boat to-night? Good. I'll go with you."

Poe hesitated.

"That's tremendously good of you, Francis, but I'm not going direct to Boston," he said.

The old doctor slapped him on the shoulder and laughed.

"What is it now?" he asked.

"I've had a letter from Helen," the young man said softly, as though he feared he might be overheard.

They were in a muddy street and in front of them was the dock where the packet lay. Not until they were near the gang-plank of the boat did Doctor Francis speak; it was as though he had been asked to diagnose a difficult case and were waiting to study every symptom. Ab-

ruptly he reached out and caught Poe's hand in his.

"Good-by," he said, "the letter is a better physician than I can be."

"Good night," Poe repeated.

In a few moments the boat was out on the lift of the tide. Little by little the lights of New York faded in the fog. Overhead the sky was dark and hollow as a cup—far up in the dome of it one star shone faintly.

III

An old tree-lined street in an old New England village; back among the trees a garden with roses and a gabled house—an antique house that spoke of comfort and restful days.

In the warm twilight a young looking woman went to and fro among the roses. She was dressed all in white. Her face was handsome rather than pretty; it was finely cut and race and intelligence—perhaps too much intelligence—showed in every outline of it. There was a nimiety of thought in the large gray eyes; an excess of feeling about the thin

lips and the delicate chin. She was either more or less than woman. Her thoughts went away from woman's affairs in the world. She hunted the dream. So all her life she had written strange little verses in which the old rhythms and the old men-made images rang and shone; and this faculty of rhyme, she felt had made her more or less than woman. She had sung to her roses; she had chanted to her canary birds; she had berhymed armored knighthood and sonneted love; and as the years swept her on into youthlessness she had grown pale and ghostly there in the old garden of the old house in the old New England village. Her poems got abroad into the world. Young girls loved them: a few men—as one might sweep a bow with his plumed hat to Nell Gwynn in her sedan-chair—had praised her poems. So she had the guerdon of an hour's fame.

Once in a midnight long ago she lay in the moonlight among the roses, lifting her gray unsatisfied eyes to the stars, dreaming of a love that never was known in the old New England village—such love as knights and warriors and

savage, blond men of the dead days might have known; and she pictured to herself with sudden sincerity how passionately she would have welcomed the fierce and kiss-hungry knight who should have ridden down out of the years to claim her; so thinking, she glanced with level eyes across the garden and saw a slim, dark man, who stared at her with dark, intense eyes. She thought she saw love in his eyes; she thought she read there a turmoil of savage passion that Lancelot never knew; but she started up with maidenly fear and arranged her disordered crinoline.

With hardly a backward glance she fled to the shelter of the old house.

All that night she lay sleepless in her bed, haunted, flushed—perturbed as Susannah when old men peered at her through the trees —wondering.

The next day brought her a letter. It was written in a microscopic hand on small slips of paper. The letter was in verse.

Reading the lines, life turned on its axis for the lonely maiden poet in the old house in

the old town in New England; she learned that the poet was a dark, unhappy Poe, whose glory was like the flicker of lightning in a black cloud. He, going his way, might have forgotten the midnight moment that had given birth to his "Verses to Helen." Helen could never forget.

She wrote to him—strange letters in which she exposed the facets of her soul. And when Poe went down into the valley of the shadow —where he had buried the young wife he loved and the world rocked under his feet—she called to him to come to her.

Now in the twilight she went to and fro among the roses, waiting.

The garden gate clicked and then swung to with a dull shock; she did not lift her eyes; not until Poe stood before her with outstretched hands did she raise her face.

"Helen!" he said.

A woman may have gone through thirty years of life and volumes of poetry, always there is some one who can speak her name in a tone so intimate that the blood leaps in her and

she is only the woman who loves. She wavered toward him, a mere white thing of love and abnegation. She whispered his name and gave him her slim, white hands.

"Edgar," she said.

"Your eyes, Helen," he said, "they are my ministers—through these dark months they have given me light and hope—Helen, your dear, gray eyes! It is good to love you. I thought I could not live—or love, for it is the same thing—any more; but now, Helen—!"

She was very pale; as he took her in his arms she felt as though something dark and fiery wrapped her round—

"Helen!" he cried, and then, "Oh! Oh! God!" and threw her from him.

He put his hands to his face and muttered something. Then he drew himself up with strenuous self-control and looked to right and left, scanning the twilight.

Helen had staggered back a little space. She stood quite still now, looking at him with frightened eyes. He went up to her very gently.

"Forgive me," he said.

Then his eyes met hers. But they were not her eyes. Were these Helen's gray, maiden eyes looking at him in the twilight? Poe steadied himself—for it was only by an effort that he kept control of his mind—and said again:

"Forgive me, Helen."

She said softly: "Edgar!" and then he knew that it was not her voice that had spoken, and that he was not looking into her eyes—for the voice and the eyes were those of the woman who had gone out of his life and whose body lay in the brown earth far away with worms for bedfellows.

So he shrieked aloud to God (though he knew there was no God) and fled away from the old garden and the roses and the maiden who stood there, a mere white line wavering, until she fell on her face in the twilight.

Twilight and falling rose-petals, the wet grass and a woman sobbing there, sobbing—that was all.

IV

THAT new invention the electric telegraph, carried a message to Dr. John W. Francis of New York. He shook his leonine, gray head, growled anathema and obeyed.

The summons took him to the dock where the Boston boat came in.

First of all the passengers Poe came running down the gang-plank—a mad-eyed, chalk-faced, laughing figure of a man.

"Doc," he cried, "Doc! my Theban—*sana mens*—I'm glad to see a sane man. There is no credit in a stupid fellow's being sane; but you, John, are a wonderful chap—you've got a brain and yet you are sane as a cabbage. I admire you, Doc!"

Poe was full of gesticulation; every nerve in him twitched. Another man than Dr. Francis would have said he was drunk with liquor or drugs. The old physician knew better. He was well aware that there are certain nerve-centers that respond more readily to stark emotion than to hashish or wine. He

locked his friend's arm under his own stout hand and led him away, saying:

"Leave your luggage, Poe, you can get it to-morrow—we'll walk and talk."

The street was dim and muddy; the two men went arm in arm; always Poe talked, in a high-keyed voice singularly unlike his own—his words, too were coarser and more free than usual.

"I've thought it all out, Doc," he said; "when I wrote 'Eureka' I did not know—now I know. We are not men. We are hybrids. Listen—we are a cross between ghost and plant. The Eternal Lie beckons to us and bids us come up to the stars. We can't go—we can't get loose—for our roots are down in the earth where the worms crawl. We are neither the sedge nor the firefly. We are the one discord in nature, we men. We are neither beasts nor gods. Unless we are sane, John—then, damn it, we are beasts. But to have the other thing in you! The firefly, John—the ghost—"

Near the river and not far from the old church there was a dingy tavern known as "The

Sailor's Snug Harbor"; as they came in front of it, Poe dragged his friend in, and found a place near the rickety table near the door. He ordered some ale; a lurching fellow brought them a jug and two glasses.

"I'm thirsty to-night," said Poe, "I'm on fire—"

At the back of the room a few longshoremen were drinking and quarreling over cards. Where Dr. Francis and his friend sat there was a small zone of silence.

"You've had exciting days of it," the doctor said; "how did the lecture go?"

"I *did* them—the confounded frog-pondians!" said Poe. "I didn't lecture. The mere expectation that I would was too good for them. No."

Poe took off his mug of ale.

"And Helen?" Dr. Francis asked.

"I was waiting for you to speak her name," Poe answered, drooping over the table, and supporting his head with his left hand. "I was waiting, Doc. Yes, I went to see her, John,"

he added with an abrupt toss of his head, "I am sane am I not?"

"Saner than I am, Edgar," said Dr. Francis, "because you see more than I do. Control yourself, my boy—what happened?"

"I went to Helen. You know if I love her, John! Perhaps you don't know. Indeed I don't know," said Poe; "no, I do not know. But I thought I loved Helen. And I went to her and said: 'Helen, I love you.' "

Poe paused and drooped again over the table.

"Well?"

"It wasn't she," Poe answered in a dull whisper, "it wasn't she—her voice, her eyes, they were my wife's eyes and her voice—and she is dead. You know she is two years dead, John! But she spoke, and the eyes were her eyes—just as she looked that night when she said 'forever—forever!' "

The physician scrutinized the hands and darkling face of the man, as one looks at a curious pathological case.

"That's not uncommon," he began soothingly.

"Uncommon!" his young friend cried, "no, how can it be—the resemblance of eyes and voice—that is common. Everything resembles something else."

"You have been brooding over your wife—you have dreamed of her eyes and voice—"

"It was not that, John," said Poe softly, "she looked at me and it was she who spoke to me—and she stood between me and Helen. I couldn't tell this to any one but you, Francis, could I? Even you think that I have been deceived. I would to God I had! Don't you see what it means to me? Ghost and plant—half of me trailing the sky with her and the other half of me in the grave with her—and the worms."

He drank again; laughed and got to his feet.

"Come," he said, "you're bad company tonight. Let us go to the 'cellar.' I would rather talk to Willis—or any one."

Poe went out into the night, and Dr.

Francis, who lingered a moment to pay for the ale they had drunk, looked vainly for him when he turned into the street. He called his name once or twice but there was no answer. He passed the church and went through to Broadway and dipped into the smoky 'cellar'; his friend was not there, but he waited, smoking interminable pipes and arguing interminable nothings.

In the meantime Poe was abroad in the night, abroad in the desolate town of New York, abroad with his dreams.

Some time in those dark hours his mind shaped itself to a settled purpose. He laughed to himself as the purpose grew in his brain—he would kill the dead! He was young; life might be his; love would be his—were it not for this dead wife who haunted him. He had loved her. God knows how well he had loved her!

But now she was dead and had gone away. Why should she come back to him and look at him out of Helen's eyes? It was a terrible thought to him that those who love once must

love forever. Was it true that since life first began to brood in the swaying plants of the young earth, to dream in the formless animal, to waken in the beast and man who howled in cave and wood—was it true that since then he and she had crept or run or flown together? God knows if he loved her—this little cousin who had been wife to him and with whom he had gone adventuring in the world of dreams; but forever—to be forever hers! That she should look at him through Helen's eyes!

He fled from the dead woman.

How he traveled and where will never be known. He rode with chimæra. Men saw him in Philadelphia—drank with him, spoke to him. Of this he knew nothing.

One day he came into the city where he and she had played at lovers, when they were children. He had not meant to come there. Yet something beckoned to him—something called to him. With stumbling feet and haggard eyes he obeyed the voice and summoning hand. Almost everything was dead in him save the courage and the will that were essentially his.

He had wayfared so long with the ghost of this dead woman who loved him that hope had died out of him and he was weary. He would have been glad to lay his body down with her body in the brown earth and keep his tryst with her soul, but the will was alive in him and the courage. It seemed shameful to him that the dead should be stronger than the living. What right had she to throw a shroud over his heart and his brain and the young life that was his? All day he thought of these things, as he wandered through the city where he and his girl-wife had loved each other first.

When night came down his will and his purpose met—so flint meets steel.

He walked swiftly under the smoking lamps down a narrow street and came to a wooden porch and a lighted window.

A door opened and he went into a long, dark hall. In the room at his left he heard the clangor of a ruined piano and loud voices. He went on. At the end of the hall a door opened, and, framed in the lighted doorway, there stood a woman. She was tall as a man; her

face was colorless and bony—the skin of it drawn into deep, harsh wrinkles about the jaws and temples; her eyes were expressionless as stone. The woman was neither old nor young, but she gave the impression of age—of something timeless and immortal as sin. As the slim, dark man went toward her she stepped aside and gave him passage into the back room.

A red-covered sofa; a few red chairs, a table cluttered with glasses and bottles, a lame nigger plucking a banjo; all this he saw as he entered. Three women stood up and waddled toward him with ghastly welcome—painted things, perfumed things, dressed in blasphemous white gowns, they came toward him. No one of the three was young. They seemed to be ageless, world-old in evil, bloated with antique sins, exiled from womanhood. Yet one was more hideous than the others. Hers was the puffed face of a gargoyle. The yellow hair hung thin and weak on her thick neck and shoulders. As her painted lips parted in a smile of monstrous greeting, the poet could see the mouth full of broken and discolored teeth.

"I will kill the dead," he whispered, and went toward this fearful mimicry of womanhood; and even as he drew near her eyes were not her own eyes—they were luminous and dark and melancholy, sad and very quiet, like the eyes of one who has seen the gray world beyond the borderland of life. And a voice and words rang in his ears. He threw up his arms and staggered from the house—into the black night and the mud of the street.

"I will come," he whispered again and again. "Yes, yes, I will come."

Life seemed to him like a tenement of black fumes and smoke. He was fain to open the door and go out into the daylight where she stood, waiting.

Hour after hour he wandered through the streets of the city that had known their love; then he fell, and men came and picked up the slim, crumpled figure and carried it away—for he was dead.

. . . . . .

In the Valley of Many Colored Grass there are asphodels, ruby red, and pale primroses.

Those who go there hand in hand are true lovers, who, when they were on earth, knew not where self began and love ended. Now and then in the ages when they are weary of happiness they kiss each other and part. And one goes through the ivory gate and the other through the gate of black basalt, but both go down into the life of men.

There they yearn for each other and suffer until they find each other; then they die and return to the Valley of Many Colored Grass, where they walk hand in hand until they must go again to earth. So there is no end of love; nor is there any change, forevermore.

THE END

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